

# Journey to Happiness and Truth

: How To Find Bliss Without Ignorance

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## Preface

This book may look like it is the story of someone's life but it is not.

It is, however, the story of a life-long search for some deeper meaning in the universe.

Some people might say that it is a search for god, the cosmic mind, the unity behind the diversity of the universe, the creation point, spiritual reality, mystical union, nirvana or an attempt to unveil the illusion of the cosmos. But we do not like to use any of those terms. In fact, we find most of those words meaningless or nonsensical. That is, we find them to be concepts that have never been adequately defined but just accepted by us all and passed on from generation to generation. Each generation just accepts their inheritance and never questions it.

And in our search, because we were open-minded and flexible, looking only for truth and not unfounded theories, we found that often we had to reject former beliefs and take on new ones, temporarily.

Most people do not like to search (it requires too much mental effort) and prefer to just be "told" what to believe in. They do not want the adventurous (and therefore stressful) life of the explorer

looking for new things or the scientist investigating the unknown. They want rather the security that comes with blind belief in the ideas that you learned as a child (your religious DNA) must be true. So such people get away from those who come armed with constant questions. Perhaps they even find it odd that anyone would even think of questioning what “everybody knows” or what everybody learned at the feet of their parents and school teachers.

But we had doubts about the contradictions and inconsistencies in what we had been taught by priests. Plus, over the years none of our doubts could never be resolved. Instead the number of doubts just increased. This naturally pushed us out into a search for alternative explanations about the nature of reality.

And, strangely, that search for knowledge seemed to naturally involve my passing through various stages of understanding.

Furthermore, those stages seem to be similar to what the average person passes through as they grow up: childhood, teenage years, adulthood, middle ages and old age. This is why the book looks like an autobiography.

But here the “growing up” is not anyone growing up in any social-physical sense. Rather it is about growing up into a fuller understanding of truth. Thus it seems to us that we pass from a childhood of fairy tale wonder and superstitious beliefs about the universe and on to a teenage revolt against conventional religious ideas, the way a teenager might revolt against his parents, which takes us into exploring alternative theories such as new age spirituality. But teenage revolt soon falls away once any person settles down into adult life. The adult, who must raise a family of their own, secure a home and be steady in providing income to those who depend on them, must have a practical, logical, planning-based, budgeting and intellectual approach to life. They must look after concrete realities like obtaining food. They have little

time to think about the non-concrete, non-physical abstractions like “spirituality.”

In a similar way our search which had gone from the myths of childhood to a rebellious interest in the spirit world, returned back to something like the mundane interests of the adult. That is, we went searching into the logical, intellectual, dry, unemotional Vedanta philosophy.

And just as adults have to be sensible (to do what is best for their family) so they soon give that up in their middle-ages when they no longer have to worry as much about finances and family since their children having usually left home and are leading their own life now – studying at university or raising a family of their own. The middle-aged adult lives a new life that is settled and comfortable. They feel peaceful without children around but also, for the same reason, empty.

Some adults then start to wonder how they are going to fill up the new empty time. They think of going back to work again or going back to school for another degree. Some puzzle over whether they have any legitimate reasons to go on making as much money as one once did (except force of habit). Their former job seems empty and pointless.

So, in a similar way, just as we had left spiritualism for Vedanta so we evolved away from intellectual Vedanta and on to the nothingness or putting-out-of-all-desires (nirvana) of Buddhism.

Obviously then the “life” stages referred to in the chapters of this book are not our own in the sense of describing what we did during the teenage years or during the mid-life years, and so on. They are rather stages that we went through during our quest to find out if there was any “god” or “ultimate” principle or “essence” to the universe. We just refer to those stages of our journey as if they were the typical life stages of a normal person

since both of these experiences seem to share many common features.

Yet the book is not just a diary of “a journey” in search of cosmic meaning. Nor is it just the daily journal of the interesting times of some explorer. It is perhaps more like the experiment recording book of a scientist in that it records my observations about the features and failings of each of the religions that I have been involved with.

Thus this book can be used to remind anyone, who might be attracted to religions, to keep an open mind about the theories the various cults advance. It can be used as an antidote to fatally “falling for” some preacher’s or swami’s theories about the nature of life and the universe.

In a more general sense this book can also be used by anyone to keep themselves from falling into despair, when they find that some long cherished belief system is built only on a foundation of imagination. It can remind them that there is always something else to explore – as long as you take whatever you discover as just exploration and not some sort of ultimate truth. Otherwise you open yourself to the same sort of disappointment all over again.

We have never yet come across any human-made cult or system, whether occult or religious or pop philosophy, that comes even close to having anything like the final truth about reality and the universe (though they all claim that not only do they have the real truth, but they are the “only” ones who have it).

And that is not because we made only a cursory or superficial exploration of some religion or philosophy. We always went in full throttle. We got involved and lived the philosophies we explored. That is the best way to find out their flaws.

Bertrand Russell once said that he developed a contempt for math only because he had become so immersed in the subject.



Familiarity breeds contempt, as the saying goes. And it is the same with religion. You never recognize the flaws in any religious dogma until you really get involved in the meaning of its teachings.

Yet we saw that the majority of adherents to some belief system are not zealots. They are not really active in their religion, except when some authority pumps them full of venom to go after members of another cult. And then they are really more like zombies than active devotees. Followers not leaders. Believers in what others tell them not people who want to use their minds and really get to understand their religion.

Thus many religious followers are usually content to give only lip service to their beliefs for one hour a week, on Sunday or Thursday night. They go to meetings to show off. We knew that for most of them the meeting or “service” was just a time for parading their new dress or hat or reestablishing their rank and placement in the “community.” And, unfortunately, for a few, the cult meetings were just a chance to publicize their business or find themselves a mate for the night.

A tiny fraction thought of the meetings as a chance to learn more about their faith. In fact at some meetings we were criticized for asking questions and wanting to discuss our doubts about some of the dogmas.

Luckily, however, there were always a minority of the cult members who looked upon the meetings as a chance to serve others in the group. That was often where we fit ourselves in. Full throttle.

And in return for all our service we often found ourselves subject to much criticism from others. One we always remember is the remark, “looks like you’re trying to build up good karma for yourself.” As if, instead of trying to live the teachings and help

others, we were trying to build up “cosmic brownie points” or “classroom gold stars” for our performance.

But this constant service did bring us into close proximity with those “higher up” in the hierarchies of authorities. That was where we learned that many authorities are often more concerned about making money than about getting to the root of their doctrines and dogmas.

Plus we practiced at home on our own. We meditated daily for hours. Sometimes we meditated for the whole day. And in between, we read – scriptures and commentaries. Living the teachings might have been just a hobby for others but it certainly wasn’t for us. But, unlike most, our practice and study went far beyond what the authorities told us to take as the dogma. We examined the teachings, thought about them, questioned them, judged them, criticized them – and so found flaws in them.

It is easy to slough off religion when it is really not a part of your life anyway. But it is much more painful when it has become your “whole” life. Your one and only reason for existing. Your whole network of friends. Your philosophy of life. Your personal identity.

Thus it was a stressful time of crisis when, because of the depth of our study and after years of service to, participation in and involvement with some faith or cult we gave it all up.

It was, however, very useful (to our sanity) to always remind ourselves that the system we had just left has its flaws. That is why we left it.

But, more importantly, it was only the realization that there are still other belief systems to explore that kept us going.

When we gave up Rosicrucianism, Martinism and Theosophy, for example, we immediately dove into Vedanta - since these former groups had borrowed much of the Yoga and Vedanta ideas

anyway. And when we gave up Vedanta and Yoga we went into Buddhism, since all 3 of those systems had borrowed extensively from each other over the centuries. In fact it is almost impossible to tell today who originated what features of these systems.

But, unlike others, we cannot recommend any of the above systems as having great insight into reality. We studied them and then moved on.

The search for truth in the universe is a never-ending quest. It is a great error to think that you don't need to keep looking – to think that your cult system or religion has the final theory.

There is always something new to explore. Perhaps the idea of constant change in your religious theories, of constant searching, exploring and investigating is the best religion of them all.

This idea is certainly what keeps us going. Keeps us from depression. Keeps us sane.

In that sense we felt like the great explorers of history. The Europeans may have started to prosper after the rise of the merchant classes and trade during the renaissance. But that would not have taken them far toward becoming, as they are now, the dominant forces in the world.

What really made Europe, and then America, into great world powers was the rise of 2 other movements: exploration and science.

The world explorers, the adventurers discovered new lands and seas, and the universe explorers, the scientists and inventors, discovered new ways to unravel the mysteries of nature. They all epitomize the spirit and virtue of an endless search for knowledge.

Many people think of Scientists as technical wizards but they are actually just explorers, like those who discovered the new world. They are people who investigate new things, new ideas

but in an organized way – the scientific method of looking at things without prejudice or preformed judgments.

So the main message of this book could just be that the best activity in life, the way to keep alive, happy, and hopeful is to not fall for any religious system, but to just enjoy being an explorer and scientist – never giving up the search for some ultimate truth in the universe.

The only word of caution is that we always had to be careful that we are actually searching or exploring or investigating and not just running about aimlessly.

Sometimes when we were reading the books of some philosophical system or practicing their methods (whether meditation, mindfulness, prayer, chanting, silently reciting mantras, visualization, or psychic projection) we felt that we were just running all over the place, from one religion to another, from one practice to another, not knowing when to stop, where to stop, or even how to stop.

Nor was it enough to have moments when we were in the quiet, in peace and tranquility, since, even then, you had to wonder about whether you were doing the practice correctly. Or whether it was even possible with such methods to find the ultimate truth behind the universe. Sometimes, even in the quiet of a dark room, it was not peaceful but frightening. A time for peace turned into a time for panic and doubt.

At other times the mind would not let go of worries, anxieties and fears. It harassed you continually. Made you run.

And if you stopped to think about it too much, you wondered if you were in fact running toward the “truth” of life or just running. Was there really any god, cosmic consciousness, unity and so on or were you just entertaining yourself? Others entertained their mind with movies and novels and you entertain yourself thinking, dreaming about merging with god. Some may find it

more pleasant to think about god than to think about murder as in a crime story, but is there a difference if both are just fantasy? Who can say what is the best type of thought?

After all, most of the time the goal in front of you, the object of your meditation or prayer, is just an “unknown” something.

Most spiritual goals are very badly defined concepts – other than saying it is something “spiritual” and who knew what that really means.

So we could say that, since there was no clear definition of the goal, we had no clue about what it was we were running to find. In that sense we were just running for the sake of running. Or running because someone (a priest, monk, swami) told us to run without specifying adequately the nature of the goal we had to run toward.

If there was really nothing to run toward, then, were we just monsters, scared off by traditional religions? Just running away? Doing nothing but running?

Was there just an imaginary goal in front of us? Was there something more to the idea of an ultimate, eternal, guiding principle in the universe? Or was it empty nonsense? An unfounded hope of the mind. If that were the case, then we were no better than a broken airplane, flying forever forward ... to nowhere in particular.

In the end we realized that it didn't matter if we were running away from traditional nonsense or running toward an illusive something. Nor did it bother us to be just running.

No explorer in world history went off on a dangerous voyage to discover new lands because he was running away from his life in Europe. (Maybe he was but it didn't affect the thrill he had in discovery). Later on, the pioneers and settlers sometimes did often go to the new world because they fled conditions of persecu-

tion in their old countries. They knew the life ahead might be dangerous, but they didn't go out for the thrill of danger and discovery. They went to get a settled life, a new life away from starvation or persecution.

But we can't say we felt persecuted by religions. On reflection, we can't say that we were running from dogmatic religions. We weren't really running from anything. We sincerely thought we were running to greater knowledge. So we were more like explorers than pioneers.

But few explorers set off knowing where they were going, except in a general sort of way. Champlain for example didn't say, "I'm going off to discover the city of Montreal." Cartier didn't say "I'm going off to find a place where I can lift fish out of the water in baskets."

Columbus did think he was going off to find a way to India, but he was a confused person – even at the end of his life he still thought he had achieved that goal when he hadn't. Later explorers didn't repeat that sort of error. It was too embarrassing to say you have some goal and then never reach it. A few thought they were looking for the north west passage around the top of Canada, or a way through the Great Lakes to the Pacific. But none ever achieved such goals. Along the way they just made many unexpected discoveries.

So for us, we might have mistakenly, originally thought we were going to discover the way to merge with god or the cosmic mind, but we never achieved such goals. Along the way we just made unexpected discoveries about the human mind and the true nature of religions.

And it is doubtful that world explorers, being away from their homes and family for years, or decades at a time, knowing that they might never return to see their family or friends, thought of their life of hardships (camping under the stars, suffering cold

and heat and bad weather and starvation and disease and wearing torn clothing or skins) as the right approach for someone who has set himself some goal for purposes of social prestige. You can hardly parade around at the top of the social pecking order when you are thousands of miles away from those in your status hierarchy and all dirty, unwashed and in rags.

So we, giving up our friends and family who didn't approve of our quest, didn't look on our exploration as for purpose of social prestige.

Sometimes goals are set so you can flaunt the fact to others that you achieved them – as Columbus wanted to parade his I-told-you-so before the royals of Europe who had refused to support him, thinking he was just going to sail off the edge of the world that “everyone” knew was flat.

And we had met members of various “occult” organizations who did want to flaunt their high spiritual position before others. One Rosicrucian, for example, used to mock us with how we were just beginners while she had reached the 12<sup>th</sup> degree. But such behavior properly belongs with those who are more interested in social dominance hierarchies than in mysticism. Such animal-like struggles and competitions for social position was hardly our goal.

A few world explorers wanted the prestige of being recognized by their king-overlord for bringing him new wealth and new real estate. Yet many world explorers, like Francis Drake, ended up imprisoned by their royal masters. And being away from the royal courts, and the adoration of courtiers and courtesans, members of fan clubs, for years at a time, where one had to wear rough garments instead of fancy, silk fashions is hardly the right way to proceed if your goal is social prestige and a higher place in the human pecking-order.

So we can say that most world explorers had no goals. No aims. They went out to find what they would find.

Most explorers just wanted the excitement of exploration. And in a way, when we look back on it, that's maybe all we wanted. It was certainly all we got.

So were we just running around, not knowing where we were going? Or were we having fun? Being happy investigating the world religions?

Very few people take up the chance to explore and try to discover if there really is any significant purpose to the universe or any foundation structure behind the cosmos. They just enjoy their life as it is: eating, drinking, sexing, reproducing, raising families, visiting, working at jobs - doing exactly what their parents before them did.

They actually enjoy it. They have fun. It makes them happy to know that, like their parents before them, they can bounce their grandchildren on their knees. For them life lives only so it can continue living and continue making new life that will also want to continue on. And for no other reason or purpose.

But for us the fun was not in doing what the majority does. It was in exploration. So we ran after the "purpose of life" because it made us happy.

Nobody knighted us the way that Shackleton was knighted for his adventurers into the South Pole. But we think that, probably, that honor didn't comfort Shackleton much when his ship was stuck in the ice for months, or when he had to drift through the stormy southern ocean in an open life boat or walk across the mountains of South Georgia for days without sleep. Nor did it help him when he died of a heart attack on an expedition. Shackleton just seemed to enjoy the thrill of it all. That was the only way to get through what he went through.



So our overall advice, after years of exploration into the ultimate nature of reality and truth is to forget about trying for goals (like meditating to reach cosmic consciousness, or reading until you become realized or “nirvanic”) and just enjoy being an explorer. Forget about truth. Forget about people who think they are right and you are wrong. Don’t panic. Relax. Be happy and explore. And read this book about our explorations.



## **Chapter 1. Childhood days, or born to be told**

Most adult animals teach their young. They have to educate them on who are predators and who is harmless and where to search for food, water and mates. Plus they have to teach them how to track and kill prey, or how to dig out roots from the ground. So human parents instinctively teach survival skills, including (since humans are social animals) how to behave in society.

But humans teach their children more than just basic survival skills. We could say that human animals abuse the instinct to teach by indoctrinating their children into their favorite prejudices, biases, hatreds, superstitious behaviors and beliefs, even if there is no basis for those beliefs. Some of this is done in the home but much of it is done in religions. Thus, when a child is still not able to think fully on its own, the parents send it off to bible school, Sunday school, catechism class or even full time enrollment at religious schools. And at home they continue the brain-washing of their children with religious mythology, dogma and ideals.

By the time children are old enough to be able to think by themselves all their thinking will be limited by and conditioned

by the biases and prejudices that were drilled into them when they were young and impressionable. Even some that later become scientists or philosophers cannot shake off their early beliefs and, when they are unable to explain some of the physical forces in the universe, fall back onto childhood notions about god powers running the show.

Sometimes religions, and, especially, charitable organizations, abuse a similar instinct in adults: the instinct that makes adults want to feed and care for the young. These charities thus show pictures of crying children to stimulate adult viewers into sending money to the charities. And the adults, just as they can't help but give in to the instinct to brainwash their children into their religion, also can't help but give to the charities. As a business teacher once said to Ray, "charities are some of the best ways to make money."

Of course the situation is not just one-sided. Besides the instincts in adults to give to children (to feed them and educate them) and brainwash them, there are also instincts in the young.

Young animals have an instinct to pay attention to and obey what the parents tell them without question. This is for basic survival. Any young rabbit, fox, or deer that doesn't pay attention and jump to it when the parent signals it to hide, run or get in the den or thicket will be usually be eaten by a predator. It will not survive. Only obedient children will survive.

So of course humans have also learned to abuse this instinct in the young. The religious teachers who, under the overpowering force of the instinct to teach, can't help themselves but teach and sincerely believe in the superstitions they impart to the young, also unconsciously seem to realize that the children are just as powerless as they are. They sense that the children are driven by instinct to believe every word they hear from an adult (while those same children would not take seriously stories they get from novels, movies and their playmates). Stories from adults are

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classified as vital to survival while stories from books and movies are classified as fantasy.

This combining of the uncontrollable adult urge to teach with the equally uncontrollable child urge to obey can lead to problems when human animals abuse the instincts. Instead of teaching valid survival skills, social skills, thinking skills and so on, the adults who are religious shove nonsense down the throats of the children. They just pass on any strange myths and weird theories about the universe that they themselves in their own childhood once heard from an adult.

A few people are even ready to die for these strange beliefs of their childhood. Thus in India many imagine that, somehow, the cow is a sacred animal and are ready to kill anyone who disagrees with them. Recently, for example some radical Hindus attacked and beat to death a group of Muslims who were transporting cows for slaughter. And in Bangladesh a few months before that a group of radical Muslims attacked and hacked to death people who were proposing a less dogmatic form of Islam. But, of course, these are mild by comparison to the terror wrought by Christians against pagan religions during the dark ages.

Another animal instinct seems to be coming into play at this stage that generates anger and hatred. Animals must defend their territory from others of the same species (who might compete with them for the same food and water resources) or they could perish. To survive animals have developed this instinct that rouses hatred against “others” and anger (energizing to be violent) to push back against any intruders into their realm. Unfortunately, just as religions (perhaps unconsciously or at least unknowingly) abuse the instincts of adults to teach and of children to obey, so they abuse this instinct to defend against others. The others are not those that threaten any real survival of the human animal group but those that threaten the survival of the religion. Religions thus use this instinct of attacking the “others” to get

their followers to attack anyone who seems to be of a different religion. This can be because of the prompting of religious authorities or just because certain individuals feel the uncontrollable instinct to attack someone who is not like them.

If you talk to any of these zealous religious people who are ready to kill for their beliefs, you soon realize that they have, really, no basis for their beliefs. All they can say is that such things as they oppose are “wrong,” simply because they were told they were “wrong.”

But if you insist that they explain their behavior, then we usually see 4 common bits of nonsense explanation. These are (1) authority of some book, (2) authority of it being an ancient belief, (3) authority of some person, and finally (4) authority of everyone around them.

The authority of some book is obviously a vicious explanation. Adults, who were usually indoctrinated as children to believe in some bit of mythology, some philosophy, or some behavior as the “right” or moral behavior, often say they believe as they do since it is written in some book, usually called a scripture to distinguish it from other books.

But why should you believe something just because it is written in a book? The most common excuse is that they believe in the book because they were told to believe in it when they were young. So their trust of book theories is not based on logic or experience but just on blind obedience to ideas drummed into them when young. That is, they have no logical reasoning or experience to back up their faith in a “book.” In fact often they “consciously” don’t even know why they believe so strongly in the authority of a scriptural “book” just as often we don’t know why we eat with forks or chopsticks or sit on toilets instead of squatting on them. The behavior is subconscious.

So we can ask: who originally told them to believe in a book? Who drummed those ideas into us that we should “trust” certain books? The answer is usually a reference back to the other 3 types of authority – person, everyone or ancientness. Religious authorities (people) told you the book contained truth. Then everyone around you confirmed that idea for you, agreeing with the priests and swamis that the book contained truth. (Of course they were really only confirming that they had been taught the same ideas by the priests and swamis). And finally, they think that the fact that the book is ancient somehow also makes it true. (Which only confirms that ancient people held similar ideas).

So it does seem that, ultimately, the real source of their belief that books contain truth is some person. In fact often religious figures don’t even want their followers to read “books” on their own. Thus swamis in the East, frequently preach that it is not “good enough” to just read and depend on books. You must have a personal guru or tutor, trained by his own gurus and tutors in turn, who can explain the “true” meaning of the books or scriptures to you.

In that sense it is not unlike the situation with the Catholic church in the West which often forbade, or dissuaded, their followers from reading the bible, implying that all they had to do was look to the priest and the clergy for the truth. And the clergy would read out at every “mass assembly” the official version of the book, as gospels and epistles, and then further explain the ideas to their followers in sermons. In that way they could be sure the masses of people only got the “official” view of what was in the books.

And in modern “Americanized” Christianity (as seen on television) the process is taken even further. Now not even gull gospels are read out but just isolated lines selected from the “bible” here and there. And most of the “show” that replaces the “mass” of earlier Christians is just one long sermon, with the

preacher telling the audience what parts of Christianity they should believe in (that week).

Without the guidance of the priest, minister, preacher, swami, guru, yogi or other, they tell you that you will be lost or misunderstand the text. And, they insist that there is also a “practice” part to the teachings and you can’t do that properly without someone looking over your shoulder to make sure you do it right.

Well there is some truth to that, since even at universities most people don’t know how to think for themselves. The average person does have to be spoon fed by professors. Or you could say they prefer listening to reading.

Indeed learning by sitting at the foot of some teacher and listening to him is the oldest method in education and before the invention of writing oral instruction was the only method.

But we have to ask ourselves if we are depending on the teacher to “tell” us what we need to know (whether in religion or in school) simply because it is the “oldest” or “original” way of learning, a tradition, or because we are mentally lazy.

Then we should remind ourselves that older is not necessarily better. Otherwise we would all behave as our ancestors did and shed our clothing to run around nude, or in animal skins, and eat with bare hands, ripping out chunks of food to gulp down, rather than employ bowls and plates and spoons and knives. Likewise we would toss out our cell phones and holler at each other. So it is hard to imagine that anyone would think it better to listen to teachers than to read only because it is the most ancient way to learn.

Thus, a few students say they would rather listen to the professor than read a text since the teacher is the one setting the final exam. By listening to him they know what sort of questions to expect on the tests and exams. But that just means they are not attending the classes to learn so much as to get a pass grade and



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then a certificate or diploma. They are not really there for learning the subject itself but for “marks.”

Others say they are not lazy but just depending on the teacher’s experience and knowledge about what is important. But that is actually contradictory. It means they think the teacher’s experience and knowledge are more valuable than that of the fellow who wrote the text book. So it really does come down to laziness – they want the teacher to tell them which parts of that 1,000 or so page textbook – are really worth knowing.

Like university professors, the clergy of the modern Protestant religions also act like they know more than the text books – the bible in this case. And, also like university professors, they consider their followers as an “audience.” In fact this situation is even more pronounced since his “audience” is watching at home and not in the television studio. They have no choice but to listen. Without even the possibility of asking questions. Without having to do any thinking for themselves. They fully expect the televised preacher to tell them what they need to know and how they should behave.

Of course, while questions are not possible when watch a televised Christian preacher, they are usually seldom welcome either in university classes. Nor in oral lectures by swamis. For example, at one Vedanta lecture we attended someone asked a question of the swami and he told the fellow that questions should be put in an envelope, given to an official at the back of the room and then the swami would sift through them, pick out the questions he liked and answer them at a special (early, early morning) meeting a week later. After saying that the swami just ignored further questions from members of the audience.

But can we depend on professor, preacher or swami to really tell us the important knowledge in the text book or bible?

Often both preacher and swami, in their sermons or lectures, diverge far away from the scriptural passages under consideration; and their comments, examples and suggestions often don't relate to the content of the books. Do we need special teachers for that?

Usually the teachers, preachers and swamis only want to be sure, like the university professors, that we get their viewpoint – that we agree with their opinions and don't think for ourselves. Sometimes at university we often see remarks by professors, even in science, that show they disagree with the opinions of the textbook authors. They think their job is to persuade people to their theories and away from the theories of another authority.

It looks like it is just a question of one “authority” wanting to compete with and dominate another “authority.” Especially when the author of the original scripture is long dead, and is not there to defend what he meant by such and such a sentence, it is easy for the present, living teacher, preacher or guru to push him aside and give his own (modern views) on the subject. That is, show that he is higher up in the animal dominance hierarchy (social status ladder or bird pecking order). Consciously he thinks he is showing that he has a better “understanding” of the dogmas and doctrines that what is in the text or bible, but subconsciously he is only acting like a mountain sheep smashing his head into the head of another mountain sheep to show, “dare to question me and I'll put you in your place.”

In fact a lot of religious texts, especially in the Buddhist tradition, like to taunt you with their superiority. Show you that they are better than you, or higher than you in the human pecking order or hierarchy. They do this in a very subtle, suggestive way by words like, “the wise man does not accept such and such,” or “wise people maintain such and such.” (See, for example Madhyamaka Karika, XV,10 or countless other examples).

The implication is that, if you want to be regarded as one of the superior “wise” guys (and who doesn’t want to be considered in that way?) then you had better believe what the author says. If not, then you are inferior to him, an “un-wise” one.

A similar method is to claim that if you don’t understand their double talk then it is not because they are talking meaningless gibberish or using terms that are badly defined, ambiguous, obscure, vague or contradictory but because you are inept.

Of course the Buddhists also use the same sort of language for more than controlling how newcomers think (limiting their thinking) to orthodoxy. They also employ these methods when criticizing their competitors, those with different interpretations of Buddhist texts. We think we are reading a text on high-minded or profound religious thought but it turns out to be only about competition among rivals to see who has the real truth, that is, who can beat back his opponents or claim they are more “orthodox” than the other who is a heretic by comparison.

In true goat-butting-heads-with-goat style, though done by “intellectually” bumping heads, they try to put them “down” others from rival sects and gain for themselves top dog spot in the Buddhist world.

People who like to browbeat you into accepting their ideas, that is, who want you do accept their ideas based on their position “above” you in the intellectual hierarchy can hardly be thought of as honest, objective thinkers. They are the last sort of person one should choose as a tutor or guru – despite their claims that you can’t do it alone without their help.

Since Ray taught himself most university subjects, even second and third year maths and chemistry, while he took other courses from “authorities,” he has experience with both methods: learning by reading and learning by listening.

To him there is really no difference between the 2 ways, except that with the book you learn from an “authority” who is absent while in a lecture the authority is present. But that slight difference does give you the opportunity to think for yourself. We can stop reading, think and then pickup reading again. You can’t do that at a lecture. (And most gurus, swamis, preachers and priests don’t want you to stop listening to them).

Of course with both methods you can also go away, consult the opinions of other authorities, and mull the ideas over. It’s just that, often, there is no alternative guru or preacher close by that one can conveniently consult – just alternative written texts with different interpretations and comments.

However, we have found that often it is best not to read a book written by a “believer” in the subject (whether religious or scientific) but by a critic.

When you read just the believer’s ideas it is easy to get overwhelmed by his/her opinions – you have nothing to compare the ideas against. But when you read a critic you get both the believers opinions (if it is an honest critic) and the critic’s opinions. Instead of being overwhelmed by one opinion, the presence of at least 2 opinions almost forces you to stop and think.

Still when we get down to it, books are just the written forms of oral lectures. Some person, calling themselves an authority (or called that by others) wrote the book.

Obviously books don’t write themselves. A person wrote a book - even scriptural books. So the authority of a book ultimately goes back to the authority of some person.

Yet a few people try to pretend that a scriptural book was written by some unknown thing – called a spirit, an angel, a genii, a god. But what does that really mean?

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Most religious adherents agree that spirits, angels, genii or god are persons, or at least something similar to a person. They have human characteristics like the ability to speak human language (knowing what different grunts mean to a human). Plus, often, these spirits, genii and gods have the shape and form and even behavior of humans.

And human emotions. Thus ancient Greek gods were jealous and conniving. Ancient Hebrew gods were angry and revengeful. Ancient Christian gods wept in sadness or angrily took a whip to money lenders.

And human vices. Thus ancient Greek, Roman (and Christian) gods liked to go around inseminating female humans (virgin birth). And a Hebrew god liked to “test” humans for fun and entertainment – obviously there is no point in any “all knowing” god trying to “know” if you really are loyal to him. (Such ideas, of course, are just versions of a person, the king, trying to discover if subjects and serfs are loyal to him, or of master and lord trying to discover if a servant can be trusted.

But why does an all-knowing god have to test anyone to discover anything? So either the god was just sporting with humans for fun or else he was another human exercising his right as an old time king (on whom the personality of most gods are based) to exercise his feudal dominance over those lower than him on the human-animal hierarchy or pecking-order.

Although it is not consistent with other actions of the Hebrew god in the bible, a few preachers think that god was not testing his people for himself but testing them for the people’s good – the way a school teacher doesn’t test students for the teacher’s benefit. But why would people have to be tested? If they get sick it is simply a matter of their biological systems kicking in to fight off a disease. There is nothing to be tested in that. We are not “better” or more advanced in some way for having had scurvy or malaria or the plague. Consciously often we don’t even know how our

body is fighting an infection. So what would a test prove? That our body is running the way it should. Well nature proves that to us without the need for any spirit god person.

By the same token are we then to say that god is also testing all the animals by making them sick? All the plants? Plants too get sick when they are invaded by molds and fungi. Does god also test all the bacteria? They too get “sick” when they are invaded by a virus. So does this person-like god test all and every one of the trillions of trillions of billions of life forms on the earth? He would be very busy.

And such an idea goes against what we know about life. Life tries to survive by eating other life. That is the eater makes the eaten “sick.” Furthermore, the “eaten” lifeforms have immune systems and other processes by which they fight off the invaders and get well again – or die (get eaten by the other life forms). There is nothing to be tested in that. Are you testing the ability of the eaters to eat or the abilities of the eaten to avoid being eaten? That is, whose side should god be on? Should he favor the eaters and let their hapless victims die? Or should he favor the “eaten” and let the eaters die?

When under attack by other life (like bacteria) your body recovers or it doesn’t. It is part of the evolved life processes. If you want to be philosophical you could say that other life “tests” us to see if we are strong enough to survive. Survival is the only skill life needs. The only skill it developed over evolution.

So no outside person, no god, needs to test that – the fact of being alive tests our survival skills. God is unnecessary for that.

But the final, strangest, people-like quality of the god of religions is that he is able to write books and knows “human” language.

Even those who say that god, whatever that is, is not really a person (or even that it is a horrible act or “sin” worthy of death to

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even suggest that god is like a person) still believe that this god, whatever that is, has enough person-like characteristics to know about people “language” and to know how to do people-like things such as writing.

Rocks don’t know what words like “bowl” or “altar” or “water” mean. Rocks can’t write. Plants and animals don’t know what words are. They also can’t write. Even cosmic energy and universal forces like gravity, heat from the sun and so on don’t know what words are. They can’t write.

Who knows what words are? People do. Who understands words? People do. Who can write? People can.

So saying that god, whatever that is, wrote a scriptural book is still saying that god, whatever else it might be, is enough of a person-like thing to be able to understand people’s words and to be able to write.

Ultimately saying you believe in some theories about creation and the universe because they were written in a book, and god wrote that book (rather than a priest) is still saying that some person-like thing (person enough to be able to know how to communicate in people-words) is the ultimate authority for your beliefs.

But one would really have to stretch the imagination to believe that this person-like god bothers to write human language books.

There are billions of solar systems in our Milky Way galaxy. The earth is not even visible, less than a speck of dust, lost from view in the vastness of the galaxy. And our galaxy is less than a speck of dust, lost from view, in the vastness of our local group of galaxies. And in the uncounted trillions of galaxies in our universe even our local group of galaxies is an insignificant, vanishing nothing. Yet religious thinkers tell us that god, a creator of the universe, took the form of one tiny, little human, not noticeable and not special, little microscopic dust particle lost in an unthinkably large universe and then bothered to figure out the grunts

those human specks of nothings use to communicate with each other.

In a 12 billion year old universe (12,000,000,000 years) this person-god thought of using a language that has been around for maybe only 2,000 years, and which constantly changes so that now we hardly understand the language of 2,000 years ago, and which will likely vanish in another 2,000 years, to teach the human dust specks. It seems hardly likely – unless this god has nothing else to do except take on human shape, behavior, emotion, thinking processes and language.

And what did this “almighty” god do this for? That is what was so vital and important to tell these dust specks? That they should eat fish on Fridays? That they shouldn’t eat pork? Or cows?

Out of 12 billion years. Out of a trillion galaxies. Out of a billion stars in one little galaxy. This almighty creator descended to our brief, changeable moment in time, to our dust speck of a world and took the shape of one of the dust specks there (and only one of them) and used the way those dust specks grunt at each other to tell us what? Not to eat pork. Or not to wipe out certain other dust specks (murder) on our dust speck of a world, except when you wipe them out (murder in war and criminal justice).

Why do we need a god for that? Are we, besides being dust particles, stupid imbeciles? Are we humans that brainless? Dumber than animals?

Do humans, while able to survive floods and droughts and wars on their own, need a god to tell them that society will fall apart if we can’t depend on our neighbor not to steal from us? Can’t we figure out on our own what we need to do – the way animals, through evolution, have figured out the right physiological processes for their bodies.



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It seems incredible that modern people could fall for such ancient myths – that special people-like gods are necessary to tell us what to do and how to behave.

If animals can figure out how to survive then so can people. We don't need spirits to tell us. People can figure things out all on their own. And people, not people-shaped gods, people-emotioned gods, people-behaving gods, can write down in a book what they think of as good religious and moral values.

While it seems incredible that some god of the universe cares about what specks of dust get merged into other specks of dust (eaten) it is very credible that some king would decide what foods his subjects can eat.

After all, in the animal world one of the reasons for the social dominance hierarchy is to control resources. The strongest animal, the one at the top of the animal hierarchy, usually controls the resources. He or she often decides who eats and what they eat or if they get kicked for trying to steal food from the dominant, alpha animals. The dominant animal can eat while the subjected, lower animals starve. And in societies of human animals the king or "lord" can dine in luxury while his slaves grow thinner. So it makes sense that a human animal-god-king would write about what foods others can eat and how they can act.

Since there is no evidence that humans are other than another animal of the earth, and since there is much evidence (similar behavior, similar body structures, similar chemical processes going on inside) that humans are just another animal, it makes sense, considering the kinds of items given in most scriptures, that the scriptures would have been written by a human.

So the authority of a religious book (no matter how you look at it) is just the authority of a person who wrote the book. Religious children (young and old) who say they believe what they

believe because of the authority of a book are ultimately believing what they do because of the authority of some person.

Claiming the book's authority is based on a god's authority, a god being something having the characteristics of a person, is really just reducing the idea of authority based on books back down to authority based on a person.

And what of this other idea of authority based on ancientness – that we should believe some theory since it was developed 3,000 years ago. What does that really mean?

A few thousand years ago people didn't have the technical resources we have today for investigating things. Nor were they as clear in their thinking. Nor did they know about the scientific method, the method of not letting previous prejudices and biases cloud your mind when you make observations in the world.

So the ancient people thought, for example, that a rock that rolled down hill toward them was trying to injure them. They thought the rock did it on purpose. And they thought that trees and animals were also like people. There was supposed to be something people-like inside the tree or animal, called a spirit, whatever that is, that made the tree or animal think and act like a human.

But there has never been proof for any of the ancient religious ideas. Nor has anyone had any objectively evaluated experiences which show that any of these ancient beliefs are true. In fact, the more we look into the matter the more we find a complete lack of evidence to support the ancient ideas. In fact we find that most of them are beyond the possibility of any sort of proof, by logic or by evidence.

Usually we can't find "evidence" since there is nothing physical to investigate. How can you check, for example, on whether a rock rolled down on you because it wanted to hurt you? The rolling is physical but the "desire" to hurt and the "thinking rock"

can't be measured. Or how can you check if your sore leg healed because some "god" willed it? The healing is physical but the "desire" or "willing" and the "god" are not.

Today we approach such problems of "invisibles" with science, using the method of comparative percentages. For example we would have two groups of people, one are kind to rocks and the other insult rocks and then we would compare the percentages to find if more rocks roll on the one set of people than on the other.

In the same way we would investigate healing by having 2 groups to compare – one prays to gods for healing and the other does nothing (and maybe a third group that calls down curses on gods). Then we would compare the groups to find out what percentage in each group is healed. Thus if we found, for example, that 70% of people in the "praying for health" group were healed while only 50% of people in the "curse god" or "do nothing" groups were healed then we would have a case for this ancient belief in healing by gods.

But, of course, while many religious preachers say god heals, they have never checked their theory scientifically. In fact, they never usually even keep records of their healings. For example at Lourdes we see lots of "healings" (crutches left behind and so on) but no records to show how many who go to Lourdes come away with no healing. We don't know the percentages. (Nor do we know if the "healings" are still present a few weeks later). Nor do we have any comparison with people who were healed and didn't go to Lourdes.

In the same way "seeing" a preacher on television "heal" someone (assuming it is not a staged act using confederates from the audience) is not "evidence" of the preacher's healing ability. We don't know what percentage of people, who would want to be healed by him or her, are never healed – what percentage come to his show sick and go home still sick. Nor do we have a group to

compare with. Nor can we even be sure if the healing was not due to some other factor – like the person swallowing some medicine right before the show and maybe forgetting about it or suppressing the knowledge.

But not all ancient knowledge is wrong. Most of the time information that was useful to survival turns out to be quite reliable. Knowledge of plants that are good to eat and plants that are poisonous, knowledge that affects our survival and evolution, usually is correct.

But even then one has to watch out. Many ancient people ate plants that were low in nutrition, like bamboo. And raw plants, besides containing disease and germs, are not as nutritious as cooked plants. The cooking breaks down the plant fibers and makes the nutrition more easily digested. So one has to beware of the idea that all knowledge that seemed to be related to survival is true.

Likewise knowledge of how to avoid predators are frequently found to be true, in the sense of truth defined as something that helps our survival. But even then some ancient knowledge about predators is not true. Is it good to run when you hear a tiger? Maybe. Most people would run. Yet, the running attracts the tiger to you. Or you could end up running toward the tiger instead of away from it. Or you exhaust yourself from running so that you are unable to turn and properly defend yourself. Many people are killed by tigers, and wolves and even coyotes – when they are running away from them in fear.

So all ancient knowledge, even about survival, is not true. The fact of it's being ancient does not make something true. How could it. There is no connection between the two ideas.

The ancients believed the blood just “stood” still in the blood vessels. The way the heart just stays where it is. The way the arm

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muscle just stays put in the arm. But actual investigation by the scientist Harvey in 1628 showed this to be wrong.

We only know blood flows through the blood vessels because someone, Harvey, stopped accepting theories supported by “authority” based on ancient beliefs and looked into the matter.

The ancients also believed that if you dropped 2 objects then the heavier one got to the ground first. It was an ancient theory. Then Galileo rejected the idea. He thought that you should not believe it simply because it is an ancient idea. He investigated the idea to see for himself if it were true and found it wrong.

The ancients believed the sun was a dwarf who went underground at night and walked back from west to east through tunnels in the earth. Others rejected the idea and theorized that the sun was a god-man who rode across the sky in a chariot. Then later still they thought the sun was not a person but rather an object that moved across the crystal layers of the sky. Then Kepler, Copernicus and Galileo did something that people who love “ancientness” hate - they investigated.

They looked into the matter. They “disrespected” the idea that something is true because it is ancient or because Christian church authorities support it. Thus the scientists found the ancient idea was false.

Of course, hundreds of years later, a Catholic Pope agreed that these explorers had been right about the sun and that the ancient knowledge had been wrong. But he still claimed that popes were infallible – always right. So he was willing to agree that authority based on ancientness is often wrong, while still holding fast to the idea that authority based on a person, a leader, a pope, is valid.

Of course to do otherwise would have been to jeopardize his position as an authority, a dominant animal at the top of the animal hierarchy. But will he one day, then, sacrifice other ancient

Catholic beliefs as well; anything can be given to the mobs as long as personal authority is saved.

We can see from this that even experts sometimes have to admit that “older is not better.” Ancientness is not better, it is bitter. Ancient ideas are usually hogwash.

Saying you believe in some belief that was drummed into you as a child, and then justifying it by pretending you believe in the nonsense because it is ancient, is really just making up unsound excuses.

Usually authority based on ancientness is found associated with authority based on books. This is because, often, the book is said to be ancient. Who wrote the book? Well it’s ancient. It was written so long ago that nobody was there to see it being written. So long ago that nobody can prove, nor disprove, that some god, whatever that is, didn’t drop out of the clouds one day and write it.

You can’t disprove anything that happened 2000 years ago in the past. How could you? Nobody living was there to witness. It is beyond investigation. You just have to trust those who say it’s so and hope they were reasonably unbiased – though such is rarely the case with ancient peoples.

This idea of the ancientness of books is of course one of the main security features of many religions. The things they say are beyond being dis-proven (as they are equally beyond being proven) since they happened in the remote past.

The claim of ancientness thus secures religions against anyone being able to show that they are wrong about their history or just inventing mythology.

It is almost as good a protection against prying researchers as claims that the doctrines came from the spirit realms.

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“A spirit came to me,” some say. What was that spirit? Something you can’t see, hear, feel. So something you can’t prove really came, or didn’t come.

Safety. Nobody can prove you wrong. Nobody can prove you right. Nobody can prove an "un-seeable" thing was not seen.

Scientists never hide behind such "un-provable" theories.

Show me gravity. Easy. Drop a ball. It falls to the ground. Do you have to “believe?” No. It is provable. You don’t have to believe it goes to the ground for it to go to the ground. Just try. Experiment. Drop it. It goes to the ground.

But a spirit? Show me. Can’t be done. Why not. You have to believe first. Otherwise it has no effects. It won’t show itself, speak to you, make noise -unless you believe.

Which means, it doesn’t affect you in any way unless you believe. That is, it cannot affect you and so is inconsequential, irrelevant, unimportant, ignorable to those who don’t believe. Another convenient hiding place for religious people to store their lack of proof.

Ancientness is a similar “hiding place” from truth. Authority of ancientness is just the authority of not being able to prove or disprove. That is no authority at all.

But we still haven’t looked at the last authority used to brainwash the beliefs of children -the authority of “everyone” around them.

You say you believe since “everyone” around you believes. They confirm your beliefs. Agree that the theories passed on to you are true. But Is that a reason to believe?

A Hindu swami wrote that a billion people believe in reincarnation so it must be true.

Well, no it doesn't "must" be anything. A billion people don't have "proof" of reincarnation. A billion people simply believe in it – without any reason to back up their belief, except that "every-one" else does.

But, off course the believers see "proof" in every event around them. Did that elephant snort the way grampa used to? Maybe it's grampa reborn. Since everyone believes in reincarnation it has to be grampa. Grampa is now an elephant. Not proof. Just a story gone wild.

Everyone who's ever really investigated reincarnation can't find proof. Just beliefs. And agreements among all parties concerned that they all agree to agree that they experienced reincarnation.

Once some American scientists went to investigate reincarnation – months or years after reported events. But they had no way to investigate except by interviews.

But is an interview a year later reliable? That length of time gives the human memory lots of opportunity to embellish events. To make them other than what they were. Even if done subconsciously and not on purpose. Criminal attorneys know that the human memory is not reliable.

And is the very process of interviewing even a reliable way to investigate? Statisticians know that at interviews people will often say things to show off, or prove their theory. And sometimes they have even made themselves believe that their report to the interviewer is what really happened.

Psychologists know that every time we "recall" some event we change the memory of it. Think of a song you knew as a kid then go and hear the original. You will usually be surprised to find that the original song is not at all as you "remember" it to be.



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So scientists investigating reincarnation have usually found only a lot of memories, a lot of accounts and stories, embellished by months of recall and, with or without the help of others producing you, additions made to make the original memory fit in with what you want to believe “should” have happened (though it never did).

And if there is no proof for reincarnation well the case is much worse for belief about going to heavens when you die. Heaven is a place where no person can go at the moment – at least until they are dead and can’t record anything about it. So nobody can prove, or disprove, anything about a heaven. It is just an “un-provable” event, another safe, secure belief for religions.

But if god, and heaven, and a next reincarnated life, are “un-provable” – by definition - then nobody can investigate them to prove whether they exist or not. So, how on earth did anybody ever originally discover that such things exist?

The only answer seems to be that nobody ever discovered such places and ideas. Some person just invented the idea and afterwards everybody else passed the information along from one person to another, without questioning. And with the unfounded information they also passed along to the next person their unfounded faith in it being correct.

But the insidious part of it was that, as they passed you the superstition, they also probably asked you to also believe it also, only because they do. You had to believe them or risk offending them. So you accepted their word and believed- if you wanted to stay a member of that society in good standing (and not be an outcast). So, like everybody else in the society you blindly accepted the superstition.

It is a superstition since it is unprovable. That is none of those “everybodies” in your society who persuade you can get into heaven, hell or the next life and come back to life to give proof of

what they experienced. They can't prove such theories since the theories are purposefully defined to be beyond the possibility of proof.

For example, what is heaven? A place no living person can get to – that's part of the definition. Only the nonliving, the dead, go to heaven. So no living person can go to heaven to prove it exists. That is, by the definition of what heaven is, no living person can prove to you that there is, or is not, a heaven.

So remarks that everybody knows about heaven and other such hidden things is nonsense by definition. They cannot prove the things they tell you since they are "un-provable" by design.

When everybody around you encourages you to believe certain things then we can ask how they know those things. They cannot have experienced it since they are not dead. So where do they get their information? Where do they get their firm conviction that they are right about what they tell you?

Everybody gets their "knowledge" from where? From everybody else. Nonsense recycled.

They are all just telling you to believe what they were taught to believe. So proof of everybody, proof of ancientness, proof of a book – all usually come back to authority of some person – a person who originally dreamt up the "un-provable" idea.

Nor are near-death experiences proof of anything beyond death. They are, like the term suggests, just "near" death and not death. The person did not die. They only nearly died.

If they had really died they would not be here, now – alive. They would be dead. But they aren't dead so they have nothing to say about death, only about near-death. Or about dying, and the experiences the brain produces while dying. Wonderful lights, colors and visions. Random brain noise. Effects of medications.

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Effects of nerve cells firing off under the stressful experiences of dying. Not death! Near-death or dying.

By definition experiences after real death are unknowable. It is nonsense to say you know of the unknowable. Nonsense to say that a living thing knows about living in a non-living state. It is like saying a red pen is blue. Red is not blue. Living is not non-living or death. You don't live when non-living, just as you aren't hard when you're soft, or hot when you're cold.

Nor do records of near-death experiences give any data beyond what is normally "possible" in the brain of a living person – that is a nearly-dead living person. There are just brain experiences. Invoked or called up memories of the past. Memories of old friends. Subjective experiences.

No near-death person has ever given information other than what they should normally know about from their memory store, or what they can normally dream about, combining facts from their memory store.

Does any nearly-dead person know about things outside their own mind, say in some spiritual realm?

First off, it's easy to say, "I saw dead uncle Pete and he says hello." Who can prove it didn't happen? Who can prove it did happen? The experience is "un-investigateable." There is no way to prove or disprove that it didn't happen.

The spiritual is, by definition, non-physical, meaning beyond experience. And experience has a physical basis to it. Physically we sense objects, physically we think, with physical nerve firing in the physical brain, about those physical objects and their abstractions. Physically we use physical areas of the brain (proven using MRI machines) to recall, dream, imagine.

What is left to do spiritually? Who can even say, since, whatever it is that can be done spiritually, can by definition have no relation to the physical.

Yet, some “spiritualists” claim that the spiritual intersects the physical – which would explain how we would even know that such a thing as “spiritual” even exists. They thus claim that spiritually, by spiritual methods, they can know physical things. Which, of course, just means that the spiritual has some physical part to it after all.

But can we then use that intersection to test if the spiritual exists? For example can a nearly-dead person, or rather a dying, person know spiritually about physical things? That is, can they somehow know about physical things which they should not know about through normal physical processes, or through normal memory and imagination?

For example, an experimenter could suggest the following experiment to a dying person. They could say, “I put a secret message, that only I know, open and on top of a desk in my locked office. Only I have a key to the office and I chose the message randomly so you couldn’t expect to find what it says by analyzing my personality or interests or hobbies. And now could you, the near death person, try to sneak a peek at it through some non-normal method, some unknown spiritual method, something you should not normally be able to do.” And then the experimenter could check if they got it right.

But no such experiments happen. No book on the near-death experience has yet to come out that depicts such an experiment. All that those sorts of books ever contain is just lots of accounts of physical brain noise of dying people: lights, sounds voices and lots of imaginary scenes built from memory. There is nothing verifiable in any of that. Nothing to check up on. Nothing that can be objectively checked to see if it did happen externally (not just in the mind of the person dying).

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Seeing “uncle Pete” does not prove that you saw any “spiritual” version of “uncle Pete” – just that your brain fired off memories of “uncle Pete,” and your mind’s imagination whipped up some nice dreams of “uncle Pete.” But did “uncle Pete” ever say anything that nobody could have ever known but him? And was it verified in some way that nobody should have known that but him?

The only close experiment to this sort was that conducted by the late magician Houdini. He offered a prize to anyone who could contact his dead mother and get her to reveal the secret message she left for him. Nobody ever got the prize. Then when Houdini died he left a secret message with his wife. She offered a similar prize to anyone who could reveal by their “spiritual” methods the content of the message. Nobody claimed that prize either. And there are a few modern magicians who carry on the tradition of offering prize money to anyone who can prove that the soul survives death. Yet in most cases nobody has even come forward to try for the prizes.

Most people do not want to perform experiments that prove or disprove their fantasies about spirits, fairies, leprechauns, angels and ghosts. They are happy to chuckle to themselves that they know more than the scientists – that fairies and angels never appear to nonbelievers. Or they enjoy the thrill of scaring themselves with ghost stories. Or they are happy to have had a good dream about dead “uncle Pete” coming to visit them, and leave it at that.

They don’t demand evidence since they just want to believe. In fact most people don’t really know what having real evidence means.

It is easy to say you believe in the spiritual because everybody else believes in the spiritual or to say you believe in an afterlife because everybody else does.

It is just a recycling of beliefs. Not a passing on through the generations of hard data.

So the “authority” of books, the “authority” of ancientness, and the “authority” of everybody telling you to believe are not valid proof for beliefs. They cannot be anything other than based on the authority, the “say- so” of a person who originally started circulating the belief to others.

So we finally have to consider this idea of believing only because some person, some authority like a priest, tells you to believe. Brainwashes a whole generation and all their descendants.

Well, we can immediately ask, “how does he know?”

How does he know? He usually “can’t” know. He can’t prove the un-provable. He can’t experience the un-experientiable things like spirits, god, heaven and so on.

These things, by definition, are hidden from the living. They are things that just can’t be experienced – except in the imagination. Physical beings, people, can’t experience the non-physical. If they ever could experience it, it means there is something physical there after all, not something spiritual.

The only real authority for any belief is evidence. Not a person, others or a book, or ancientness.

But any investigation into spiritual concepts that we learned as children will usually find that there is no evidence – and the notions are just based solely on the say-so of some authority. Or the present authority’s recycling of the “say-so” of his teacher- his authorities.

And don’t think this confusion about accepting notions because of authorities applies only to religion. The idea of people accepting notions, not on evidence, but only because it comes from an authority, unfortunately, can be found even at universities. Even among scientists. Many students in science courses to-

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day still believe some idea solely because it was said by some scientist, university prof, or a recognized expert, whatever that is.

And even when they refuse to accept information from ordinary authorities, many still suspend their mental powers when faced with authorities who display special awards of recognition. Certificates that proclaim they are above all other authorities. Higher on the “knowledge” pecking order.

For example, while some are critical of ordinary scientists they might allow facts coming from a Nobel Prize winner. Or, even more firmly believe in facts from a double Nobel prize winner.

Should you automatically believe something because it is said by a double-Nobel prize winner? Linus Pauling was a distinguished professor, scientist, expert in chemistry, Noble prize winner – double Nobel prize winner. Few men have won that award twice. He did. So when he proclaimed that Vitamin C was a cure all for many diseases. Many people believed based on his authority. He was wrong. Dead wrong.

You can’t believe something because an authority says so.

Back in the 1890s a couple scientific authorities (even an eminent one) went around saying that humans then knew everything there was to know about the laws of physics. That’s right, absolutely “everything.” Our knowledge was “complete.” Then along came Einstein, and relativity, then quantum mechanics, quantum electrodynamics, nuclear physics, discovery of galaxies, of high energy particles, of quarks, of god particles and more. And many new inventions came along, some even allowing us now to see atoms.

So the scientific authorities of 1890 were WRONG.

And the scientists of today still don't know everything -though they know much more than religious authorities about the nature of the universe.

Yet they all agree that their present “cherished” ideas may be thrown out the window tomorrow. (But a few still think of themselves as “authorities” on science - the human dominance hierarchy or animal pecking-order never vanishes). Nothing in the world is permanent so it is only right that no “theory” should be permanent either.

So why do people believe in something which they have absolutely no right, by virtue of collected data, to believe in?

It comes down to believing simply because you were indoctrinated into that idea as a helpless kid. Yet somebody indoctrinated you. The people around you. Books. And usually also religious and school authorities. All evidence lacking authorities. Brain-washing hapless children simply to control them and show them their place in the social pecking order.

Unfortunately the first few years of school (elementary and junior high) seem to be all about discipline. Sure they teach you to read, write and do arithmetic also. But most subjects like history and science are taught as memory exercises. You have to remember what the history authorities tell you to believe in as history. You have to remember what the science the authorities tell you to believe in as the unbreakable laws of science. You are not taught to think for yourself but only to accept and memorize.

But, beyond having to memorize what authorities preach most of school is only about discipline. We are taught to give in to the teacher, who is above us.

You have to learn to bow to teachers and social customs. You have to learn to shut up and do what they say. Anyone making noise in a classroom, doing the wrong work, or expressing



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doubts, faces discipline. Anyone who does not memorize what they are supposed to faces bad grades. You must obey.

As a kid Ray saw some students enter a new class on the first day of school. The teacher immediately erupted into violence like a volcano spewing out venom. He didn't want them in his class. He yelled. He screamed. They had done nothing so far, at least not that anyone could see. Yet he picked them up by their collars and hauled them out of his class. Anybody who hadn't obeyed in the past didn't belong in his class, he said. And they weren't allowed back in. That was in high school. It seems that teaching obedience and discipline are even a major part of the high school curriculum.

And that school disciplining is apparently good training for adulthood. You go to factories or offices and obey the boss. Shut up. Do what you are told. Don't think. Don't suggest. Do your work. Be on time – a time set by the boss and society- or face being hauled out of your seat and tossed out of the room.

So school obedience – or as it is sometimes called, respect for authority- is good preparation for the working world.

The upper class, of course, avoids enrolling their children in public schools since they don't want their children to learn obedience and how to take orders. They instead send their kids to private schools to learn how to be the ones giving orders- the leaders others must obey, not the ones obeying.

But, even then, at private schools, they are not taught how to be scientific. They are only taught how to give orders, just as at public school they are taught how to take orders.

They are taught how to become the dominant ones at the top of the human-animal pecking order. The business leaders and political leaders.

Even at the level of university courses we often see that discipline is more important than learning the details of the subject. For example, Ray often had to participate in the group marking of final examinations and found that many of the markers acted as if the purpose of the exercise was to reinforce rigid compliance with the way the head professor thought. If a student's answers didn't conform to the professor's "solution" they marked a student's answer wrong – even if they had solved the problem correctly, but by another method.

Of course the Catholic private schools of our youth took public school obedience training one step further and instilled a real fear of the priests and blind faith in the virtue of obedience (gutless turning the other cheek or giving up) and meekness (lack of initiative to do anything with your life except serve others) and faith (how to follow the authorities blindly).

Furthermore, the school obedience lessons are also good preparation for the military. You go to the military to be ordered around. You are not to reason why. You just to do and die. Die for king or country - authorities. Obey and kill as ordered. (Killing on the order of authorities is the only time the leaders will let you kill without penalty).

Perhaps they also think that war-killing is a way to release stress in the people. Instead of rebelling and maybe killing your leaders you kill the "enemy." You thus help your leader by directing your killing toward outside competing leaders. You raid your leader in his competition with members of competing social dominance hierarchies.

But we can't forget that, above all else, school is good preparation for obeying in society in general.

Thus at school you learn politics – that the political system of your society is best, that your politicians know best how to run the country and that you must simply give in to their demands.

That you don't challenge leaders (unless you went to private school) but must obey leaders. You vote between 2 leaders and thereby decide which of 2 dominant animals is most fit. You never vote for anybody you want. Just for those you are made to want, by advertising. Or told to want. You obey even about how you pick your master.

At school you learn economics – that the economic system of your country is best. That you don't challenge leaders. Political leaders and Business leaders are to be obeyed. They supposedly are the authorities, the experts that know what is best. You must agree that they know what is best for you and for the “good of the public,” whatever that vague term means and the economy.

At school you learn science – that the ideas of the scientists are best. You must obey and agree that they know what they are doing.

And you learn religions and other superstitions. In religious teaching you especially learn that your religion or superstition is best. That the authorities are to be obeyed. And that there is a hierarchy of authorities – as in most animal species.

A dominant (top of the heap) mountain sheep will break the head of anyone who doesn't agree that he is in charge and to be obeyed. A dominant deer will kick in the chest of any other deer who challenges him or her.

Politicians don't like to be questioned. They like to be obeyed. They are authorities – the dominant animals and will kick out your teeth if you raise a rebellion.

Business people don't like to be questioned. If they want to put a ore mine, oil well, factory or pipeline then it is not your job to point out environmental chaos on the horizon. They will try to kick your teeth out if you rebel against the dominant human animals by opposing their projects. And if you show them evidence they might even make up evidence of their own.

So obedience training in school has social value for keeping the animal hierarchy working efficiently.

Animal hierarchies have a purpose. If food is given out equally (socialist style) to all animals then there won't be enough for the strongest, or fittest. In a hard winter the weak ones will die anyway, even with a little extra food. The strongest ones who might have survived if they had had "all" the food, will be weakened by not having enough food due to this (socialist) sharing. So the whole species is at risk now.

Millions of years of evolution led life to the behavior of letting the weak ones die off and giving all the food to the fittest. With all the food the strong ones at least have a better chance of surviving.

So animals organize in hierarchies to institute this system of survival of the fittest. The strongest at the top of the hierarchy get all the resources.

In human animals the richest have over 90% of all wealth. The majority of weaker animals back off (obey) the dominants. They let them have the food. In human animals the majority of people are taught to obey, back off, don't think, don't rebel, don't pose problems for the leaders (political, business and religious). Let them have the resources.

Ordinary people, the followers, are taught, and brainwashed, into being peaceful. They are programmed by society to watch TV and take drugs, listen to fairy tale movies, science fiction, religious dramas and myths. Anything that diverts their attention. Any story.

Just don't question leaders. Don't rebel. Obey. Authorities are to be obeyed. Listen to People Authorities. Accept their nonsense, illogical, unreasonable, non-fact based, non-experienced based ideas about the authority of books, authority of everybody (who all stay quiet and obey the leaders and their stories). And forget

that books are made by people authorities. Forget that everybody else is simply obeying what authoritarian people say. Forget that ancientness is just a reference to the authorities of the past – a reference to the hierarchy system that has existed for millions of years- that evolved in the animal world.

Of course, besides the dominant leaders and the masses of followers, there are a small number of rebels in any animal species. The vast majority of the masses just accept and obey but the rebels challenge.

The purpose of the challenge by rebels is to keep the leader, the authority, on their toes. To make sure they are in fact the strongest, the fittest, the ones who should survive while you sink.

While the dominant elephant seal guards his beach, his harem, his mass of hundreds, a few rebels clamor onto the beach and challenge him. He usually bloodies them and sends them running.

In the walrus hierarchy a few rebel walruses challenge the dominant one and the dominant stabs them and sends them to death. A few mountain sheep challenge the dominant one and try to bash him in the head. He usually sends them running, unless he is weak. So challenges by rebels prove that the authority has a right to be the authority by virtue of being the fittest, the strongest.

In human animals most challenges come from a small group. In the French revolution the majority of people were happy to obey the king, tend their farms. To help keep them in line the church entertained them with its fairy tales and their moral lessons about how to obey authority, and how god punishes those who don't obey.

Only a small group of rebels challenged the French king, not the masses. And the king was weak – not the fittest- so he fell. Then the rebels took command. Robespierre became the new dominant – a terror. Who in turn fell as Napoleon rose. Like all

rebels, (though they may cry about “liberty, equality and fraternity” ) their only goal is to challenge and once they win, to replace the dominant one as the new dominant, alpha males.

And in the Russian revolution the czar, as dominant leader, fell not because the majority disliked him. The vast majority, like seals on the beach, were happy to lounge around in the sun. A small number of rebels deposed him, challenged him as the fittest and won. And those rebels didn’t introduce “equal sharing” and socialist equality. They simply took over as the new dominants. The people went on as before. Lenin, then Stalin became the new dominants – the fittest. And sent any new rebels off to Siberia.

And in the American revolution a few rebels challenged the king and won. The majority didn’t care. Some of the mass of people were so against the rebels that they left the country and went north to Canada. But the rebels went on to become the new leaders. The new dominants at the top of the hierarchy. And then, as consolation to the people, set up a system of voting to decide which of the rebels will one day replace the dominant leader, taking his place.

In the American voting system, however, we must remember that not just anyone can be selected to become the new dominant, the new leader. Selection can only be made from members of the hierarchy of leaders. Only a rich person can ever become a dominant politician in America. Those educated at private schools. The public still must let the leaders run the show. They must be quiet and obey authorities.

Many people think they are going after freedom (in a political or religious sense) when they become a rebel. But, rebels are those who challenge authorities, often just so they can replace those at the top of the hierarchies and become the new leader. This is obvious in most human revolutions. In every human society and in every nation state there have always been, and will probably always be, rebels.

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Human rebels, are of course just blindly giving into their animal instincts to challenge the leaders (whatever ideology they pretend to follow). In the animal world the rebel animals challenge the old bulls to see if they are still strong enough to lead. And if they succeed the rebels simply want to replace the leaders as the new tyrants (and then do exactly what the old leaders did). That is why, once the rebels become the new leaders, (of whatever ideology) they usually eventually face new rebels of their own in turn, and the human dominance behavior continues on – wars never cease.

So being a rebel is not being free. Being a “rebel” is only giving in to subconscious instincts. Real freedom can only come if we evolve to free ourselves from blindly succumbing to the real tyranny of instincts, of the dominance hierarchies. Real freedom comes when we are neither a blind follower who believes whatever he is told as a child, a blind rebel nor a blind leader.

The easy part of childhood is to learn to be a peaceful sheep, to sit still while they wash your brain and get you to believe in unbelievable stories. The hardest part of growing up is to realize that humans are just animals and that all the religious stories are just there to stop you from thinking.

Leaders don’t want us to know this. Religious leaders try to keep this from us. They don’t want us to know that all the religious myths are there for one purpose, to make us behave as all animals do. To make us respect the idea of the animal hierarchy that evolved over millions of years.

If we knew we were just animals and that religion and politics are just human versions of the animal hierarchy then we wouldn’t (since humans can think occasionally) just blindly follow religious tenets, political propaganda and educational brain-washing. We wouldn’t just blindly accept our lessons that we must obey and respect authorities or those on top of the human animal hierarchy. We would use the skills other animals don’t use too much

– thinking, analyzing, investigating scientifically, inventing and acting with compassion toward each other.

Dominant animals don't like to be challenged – even though they expect it from a few rebels, that is, other hierarchy members. But they don't want rebellion from the herds.

Dominant humans expect rebellion from rebels, members of the dominant hierarchy – it is nature's way to ensure they are still the fittest for survival. But they don't want the chaos of rebellion from the human herds. Religious stories help keep us, the masses, down. That is, the religious myths and doctrines keep us as herd animals without our being aware that this is what we are.

So it is best, and has been the case throughout human history, that the authorities won't let us learn that we, and they, are just animals, acting as all animals do. Kicking in the teeth of others to prove the survival of the fittest. Scaring off ordinary members of the human herd who willing let them have the lion's share of food and money and resources – as all animals do.

And the second hardest part of growing up is to realize that we don't have to be just another animal. We don't have to blindly give in to authorities and their stories, bibles and religious dogmas. They are just part of our animal heritage. But science allows us to be more than an animal.

While the queen of the mole-rats in Africa controls the mass of workers by her chemical excretions, the dominants among the human animals control the workers by physical force or by their religions. For example, almost all human civilizations have had a slave class. Even Jesus never said anything against slavery (upper class animals forcing lower class animals to do as they are told), though it was popular in the ancient Roman Empire.

Religion is not some high-minded spiritual doctrine. Religion is just a human way to be an animal. It is the human way to force us to step in line with the animal dominance-hierarchy.



In politics, in church, or in university one never challenges those in charge, the dominants. Even some university professors get angry when you challenge instead of memorizing. One MD, writing of his training, noted that he was warned to stop asking questions of his teachers or he would never finish medical school.

But if we are to evolve beyond our present animal nature (the reliance on hierarchies that has been with all animals for hundreds of millions of years and which gets us involved in constant competition and wars) to something better, then we have to grow up and out of our animal urges and instincts. We have to realize that we don't have to trust authorities. We don't have to obey them blindly but can think for ourselves.

But don't use that idea to become a rebel, a human animal challenging the dominant authorities. A rebel is involved with the animal hierarchy, as one challenging those at the top of it. So, being a rebel is still being part of the animal world of hierarchies. That is no way to advance the human species.

Don't challenge authorities to their face. By doing that you only participate in the hierarchy. You are then lost to the hierarchy. You are part of it, fighting dominants for position in the hierarchy.

Realizing that you don't have to respect and automatically believe authorities (political or religious or scientific), or authorities hidden as books, opinions of those around you or ancientness, means just not accepting a role or place in the human hierarchy and staying away from it. It does not mean being a rebel or challenger ON the hierarchy.

Instead be a explorer, a true scientist (not a professional scientific expert or authority), that is, a person looking for true knowledge. Keep away from scientific authorities and authoritarian books. Don't give them the chance to fall unconsciously into animal behavior and kick you.

Just do your exploration and research for yourself, on your own, quietly.

Most animals play when young. They search through and explore the world around them.

But the play is soon interrupted by their parents who teach them the rules of society. Or the play turns into combats with the object of finding your place in the animal hierarchy. You don't want to get into competitive play.

This playing of the child should be for discovery (not for hierarchy position). It is what true exploration and science is all about. You want to keep that as alive as possible. It helps us push off the stage in life when authorities arrive to lay out the rules of behavior and belief.

This play is possibly the only avenue we humans have to evolve our species to something never before seen in the animal world – non violent, non-hierarchy behavior.

True science is based on play, on exploration, on research, on investigation, on experiments – unaffected by those pushing authoritarian belief on us.

This is why science had fights with religion in the past. Why they always will, despite what some religious believers want us to think.

Religious leaders will always hate true scientists because playfulness can never come to agreement with authoritarian learning. Authoritarian parents want their kids to “stop playing” and come in (to the hierarchy as an authority). Exploratory playfulness can never be the same as playfulness to learn about hierarchies and violence.

Childhood playfulness seems the only opening that humans have through which we can squeeze ourselves toward higher stages of existence. It seems the only behavior available to us by

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which we can send our evolution off in a different direction from that of the other animals.

Of course many religious thinkers don't want us to believe in evolution. They don't want us to know that we came from the lower animals. If we knew that then we might guess that human behavior is just animal behavior, human hierarchies are just animal hierarchies. And then it would be easy to recognize religious myths for what they are: efforts to control those lower on the hierarchy. So the religious thinkers will fight the idea of evolution to the bitter end. They like their power position and hate the idea of evolving beyond power hierarchies.

But anyone who wants to rise beyond the human-animal stage of evolution has to be willing to put aside their childhood indoctrination and blind acceptance of the religious myths that keep them stunted in animal behavior. So they have to also stay out of being rebels in that hierarchy combat just as they have to stay out of being mindless members of the herd.

The only way open to anyone who suddenly realizes that childhood religions are animal behaviors, the only way open to evolving humans beyond our present animal stage, is to engage in playful exploration, research, discovery, invention and science. To seek for explanations beyond what authorities tell us. To seek forever and ever and hope that this pushes human evolution toward a new direction – free of hierarchy-related ideas like wars, violence, greed and hate and belief in ancient fairy tales told by authorities.

The hardest part of all this is the first step: learning to free yourself from all the nonsense and fairy tales you learned as a child, learning to free yourself from authorities and what they tell you, to free yourself so completely that you don't even want to participate in hierarchies any longer. And the second hardest part is learning how to hide this ambition from authorities – so you can look for a better way to live, a style of life that is better than

that existence based on hierarchies that we inherited from the animals, without having the authorities constantly hounding you and clawing at you. That is, you have to learn how to pretend to obey authorities as you leave them and go out to explore the universe.

## **Chapter 2. Teenage years, or off to search**

Most people stay fixed in the values and ideas they were indoctrinated into as children. If they were born into a Catholic family then they stay forever a Catholic. This is because it is very hard to shake off the years of brain washing from those around you. Book authorities tell you that what you believe is right. Others around you tell you that what you believe is right. The priests and officials condemn you if you even think that what they tell you is not right. And the very ancientness of your religion itself is somehow reassurance that it must be right.

We could say that the environment in which you live keeps you loyal to your childhood beliefs. So, the only way out of childhood beliefs is to get out to a totally new environment.

Many animals, on reaching a certain age, leave their home and family, their father and mother. Some just, almost accidentally, one day wander off. Others are forced out by combats or rivalry.

Likewise many humans get into conflicts with parents during their teenage years and are then either “thrown out” or pack up and go. But others leave because they are attracted to a better life. For example they may want to get away from the poverty of their

home environment and thus set off to become rich through business, acting, music or sports.

However a few are not repelled physically by parents or their home environment, but just by the mental climate. They don't like something about their childhood religions and so, while staying close to home, nonetheless drop their childhood beliefs or no longer attend churches. Some of these sorts of people even become atheists or materialists. Or just ignore religion. Yet a tiny fraction set off in search of, not shiny new wealth, but sparkly new religions. Their pursuit then usually takes them in one of two directions: western new age occultism and spiritualism or mystical eastern religion. (Of course when those born in the "mystical" east revolt against their home-grown religions they head for the western religions and materialism).

We were among those who revolted against our "home-grown" Catholicism. This was because, at first, we felt it was just empty rituals, backed up by ridiculous mythology.

But for us the most significant thing that we disliked about Catholicism was that we felt that the philosophy was horrible. We were supposed to believe that it was good to be poor, good to be humble and meek, good to give up or give in and not stand up for yourself but rather to "turn the other cheek" or give attackers a second chance and good to accept suffering. Good to die on a cross.

For example, Lise's mother once asked her parish priest for help: she wanted to get her son into a place where he could train to be a chef. The priest refused. The Catholic way was to endure our suffering and poverty and meekly wait for god to act, if he so chose.

Another time, while we were visiting France, Lise went to see a Bishop who shared the same family name with her, to see if he could guide her on the origin of the family name. She tried to be

friendly but the bishop tossed her out – for daring to approach someone so exalted. She should have been meek and humble not bold and daring. She should not have asked him for help. And, while she was shocked by the experience, she knew she had no right to be angry with the bishop- she was supposed to turn the other cheek to him and accept his berating of her.

Plus we have often had similar experiences of being attacked mentally by Catholic priests. But that only tells us that they live the philosophy they believe in or that they think it their duty to teach their “flock” about meekness, humbleness and “turning the other cheek.”

Imagine what would happen to animal life if they lived by the philosophy of “turning the other cheek,” or giving attackers a second chance to get you. Imagine what would happen if, after a horse swats his tail at a mosquito and misses, the mosquito then gives up and gives the horse another chance to kill it. Mosquitoes would soon go extinct. Imagine what would happen if, after a lion misses his first assault against an antelope, the antelope gives up, halts and presents himself to the lion, instead of running away, and gives the lion another chance to kill it. Antelopes would soon cease to exist as a species.

This philosophy of “turning the other cheek to someone who assaults you” goes completely against life force. Life wants to fight. To struggle. To compete. To eat other life as food. To live.

If all lifeforms behaved by “turning the other cheek” it is fair to say that there would never have been any life in the first place. But that is not how life acts. When situations in their environment make it hard for life, life does not give up, or turn the cheek. Life adapts. Life becomes fitter or more able to combat the stresses in the environment. Life shows us that it wants to become the fittest one who will survive.

Life wants to go on living and will do whatever it takes to stop forces that want to end its life. In that sense it is no wonder that some Christians hate the idea of evolution since the idea of “survival of the fittest” goes against the Christian philosophy of giving up a cheek to anyone who attacks you. Of giving up, of giving in.

And there is more anti-life philosophy like this in the Christian scriptures. For example, if someone steals your shirt you have to tell him to wait and then give him your coat. Say, “Hold on thief. Here’s some more for you.” That is, we should not stand up to thieves, according to Christian philosophy, but encourage them.

And why shouldn’t you just give up? After all, according to the Christian Bible, rewards don’t come on the basis of merit or struggle or skillfulness. They come on a whim of a whimsical god.

A thief is hung on a cross next to a god. The thief must have done something terribly anti-social to be so condemned. Nothing tells us he is other than a thief. Yet he gets to go with the god to a heaven. Why? For what? He did nothing worthwhile. Nothing good for society or for himself.

So what did the thief do to gain such a grand treasure as instant entrance to “heaven?” He just behaved the way, in the ancient world, that slaves normally behaved when in front of their kings. He acknowledged the person beside him, Jesus, as an ancient king-god. And like ancient king-gods do, this Lord, Jesus, on a whim, bestowed a favor on the thief for being so subservient. For heaping praises and compliments on the king in accordance with the ancient customs.

It is no different than the message of the Hindu Scriptures that says



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*“Even if the most sinful worships me, with devotion to none else, .... he too should be regarded as righteous.” Bhagavada Geeta, ix,30*

So the Bible’s lesson, like that of the Geeta, is that merit in life counts for nothing. We just have to be ready to scoop up the rewards that come on the whims of your king or lord when you shower him with compliments and praises. Can you imagine: a supposed creation force, a universal power, an all knowing, all powerful entity, is said to relish being praised, as if it were some petty king of yore.

And Christian Bible stories tell of a poor beggar who sat under a table. The man eating at the table is a rich “merchant” who has survived, struggled, accomplished and made something of his life. In his generosity the rich man gives the beggar something to eat. Why? Out of generosity. Or maybe out of compassion. Certainly not because of the merit of the beggar. Nothing says the beggar is a good person, worthy of any merit. Worthy of favors. Yet the rich man gives him something.

Then on a whim of “god”, their social stations are reversed after they both die. In heaven the merchant suffers (for no apparent reason other than for being rich) while the beggar lords it over him (for no apparent reason). Why does the beggar now enjoy such a high and mighty place in heaven? Certainly not because of anything socially worthwhile that the beggar did. There is no good merit mentioned. No skill. No intelligence. No survival urges.

And the beggar is not even a nice (compassionate or moral) person since he won’t even give the merchant a drink of water. The beggar won’t even return as much as he got from the merchant while living on earth.

So we again have the idea that we don’t get anywhere on merit, on morality, on living a good life. The Bible stories un-

knowingly teach us that it is pointless to be a good person and pointless to live a good life.

Obviously, a society cannot exist without morality. For example, if we all have to worry about our neighbor stealing from us or killing us then our society would disintegrate. We would so mistrust each other that we couldn't live together. So common sense tells us that good behavior, meaning behavior that helps you get along with others, is good for society.

Furthermore, since humans survived, migrated to all parts of the earth, adapted to almost every known environment, subdued many other animals (or drove them to extinction) and basically conquered the earth, by cooperative effort in societies, this tells us that, ultimately, the word "good" means behavior that contributes to the survival and evolution of humans.

Yet, beyond a few isolated words about "loving the neighbor" we see (actions speak louder than words) that the people being rewarded in Christian scriptures are not being rewarded for that sort of goodness, for that sort of morality. Being good in that sense is pointless in the Bible. The only thing that matters is preservation of the animal hierarchy - worship of the king-gods at the top of the human-animal hierarchies.

What seems to count, if we are to believe the scriptures, is squirming like an ancient courtier before a king. And that king-god, on his whim, that is, if it pleases him, may acknowledge your praises, smile good fortune on you his servant, nod and let you go to heaven.

We are not to get any success in life by our own struggles, effort, perseverance and hard work, but only get "rewards" through the king- god.

The way children beg their father for a sweet candy is the way Christians are supposed to approach god, who is even depicted as a "father." Jesus tells us we should say, "our father... hallow be thy name (praise to the king)... thy kingdom come...thy will be done." Then after the customary bowing and buttering up of the king we beg for favors by saying, "give us this day our daily bread ... deliver us from evil." But we do it without being too pushy. Since you can never know if the king will grow angry with your upstart begging. Thus in our prayers we are supposed to flatter the king with the idea that he is the one in charge by saying, "thy will be done" and "for thine is the kingdom."

We can see that, according to Jesus, the main feature of prayer is that we must beg and beg and beg the king and then wait for the king, lord, god to grant us a favor. Or we beg daddy-god to help us out.

And if daddy-god grants you a boon, a favor, it is not because you deserve it for your good moral behavior or work ethic. Such ideas are never mentioned in the Lord's (King's or Father's) prayer of Jesus. We are to expect what we pray for just as a "favor" from the lord. (Christians are fond of calling god their Lord - more fond in fact than calling him a father. But then ancient fathers were masters of the house, much as kings were masters of the land).

Yet prayer does have some benefit. For example, if you are out of work you will not get re-employed as long as you are sad, depressed, anxious, fearful or angry. Nobody will hire a person who comes to them angry. They don't want to argue with you. Nobody will hire someone who looks depressed. Nobody wants to sit in an office and look at someone who weeps all day. So prayer is valuable in that it keeps you in a positive frame of mind.

When you pray you revert back to childhood days when everything was taken care of by daddy and mommy and you felt secure and confident because of that. The thought that a "sort of"

god-daddy is still looking after you makes you so confident that you can go out job hunting and look buoyant and like a go-getter and impress the job interviewer to hire you. The prayer raised your spirits enough to help you, on your own, get the job.

We can see that it is not the "debasing of yourself before a lord" but rather the confidence building that makes prayer effective since many "new age" cults employ a similar method to prayer but they call it "visualization." You "visualize" yourself working again. You see your self performing the tasks of some professional. You feel confident that, because of cosmic or psychic spiritual forces, (rather than a whimsical god) the visualization will help you get a job. You are so confident that when you go to a job interview the employer engages you. Both prayer and visualization raise your spirits enough, give you that little extra boost you needed to get you going again, so that you were able once more to go out and get working again.

Psychologists call it the placebo effect. When you feel good it changes you physically since those "good feelings", and all feelings, occur in the physical brain. With MRI scans we can measure how good feelings change blood flow in some parts of the brain. Also, feeling good causes chemicals to be released which in turn alters nerve endings. This produces more chemicals that affect areas as far away from the brain as the thyroid, adrenals, pancreas and intestines, and even the muscles. You could say that feeling good or being happy changes your brain to a happy brain. Thus, for example, Norman Coussins was even able to cure himself of a debilitating paralysis by laughing (instead of by the touch of Jesus the lord or king).

In fact, to use visualization or prayer or laughing we don't have to believe in any "higher power" or be affected by hand waving or the touch of a king-god. Any method that makes us feel good will produce physical effects in us. And they will pro-

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duce them automatically without our having to debase ourselves like a slave begging from a king-god.

Both the old and new testaments of the Bible refer to god as a king-like being. Both stress obedience to, and worship of, this king-god as our main duty. But they otherwise differ in their treatment of the relation of god-king to man-servant. In the Old Testament people get punished when they don't obey. In the New Testament people get rewarded when they obey. In the old testament a disobedient slave gets beaten up (flood of Noah, destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah etc.) but in the new testament an obedient slave gets into a heaven of "earthly delights." (Some think the old testament god is an ancient volcano spirit:-sending fire and brimstone as volcanos do, appearing as burning bushes, living on mountains, especially the volcano of mount Sinai and being angry like a roaring volcano, and demanding animal and human sacrifices).

But, unlike visualization or laughter, prayer is not harmless. Prayer short circuits the need for prevention, the need to stop yourself from sliding into poverty and ill health. Why should one be clean and eat nutritious meals, exercise, wash, keep our homes free of filth and garbage when we can get sick and then pray to the king-god to get us back to health? For example, Christians in medieval times lived in squalid cities, full of infections like the plague, without proper sanitation, diets and medical practices and then prayed to god to save them from disease or starvation.

Prayer also short circuits the need to lead a wholesome life. Why should we take care to avoid alcohol and drugs and promiscuity when we can indulge freely in them and then, afterwards, pray to god the king to set our life back on the right path again?

And prayer also short circuits the idea of personally struggling and working for what you need and tells you to instead beg for it from the lord, king, god. This is not just preaching laziness.

It is teaching a type of cowardice – a refusal to face up to your responsibilities.

Yet, this type of behavior (of begging your needs from the king and flattering him so that he will grant you favors on his whim), is not unique to humans.

Many of the other animals also arrange themselves into hierarchies. For example among the mole-rats of Africa there are the 3 social classes of queen, warriors and slaves. The slaves are the majority and they dig tunnels and gather roots. The warriors defend the tunnel system but mostly sleep, like the queen. However the queen, every so often, goes around to visit the slaves in the tunnels, to nip at some of them, and to spray chemical scents that keep the slaves hypnotized and serving her. Among humans the kings don't spray chemicals at us but instead force religion at us when we are young. (However, Marx (Karl not Groucho) said that religion is the "opium of the people."

Likewise, in mountain sheep and in wolves, the top of the hierarchy (called alpha animals or dominant animals instead of kings, sultans, popes or gods) will charge after any animal lower in the hierarchy who comes too near it. This behavior also occurs even in the "romanticized" deer. Reality is not what you find in the Bambi stories. We have witnessed high ranking deer rise up on their back legs and kick out at other deer who get too near the food supply.

This hierarchical arrangement, often called a pecking order, serves a very useful purpose for animal survival. The strongest animals usually rise to the top of the hierarchy. In fact the animals usually engage in fights, like the famous head-butting of goats, sheep and elk, to make sure that the strongest end up dominating the group. But what is the advantage of having the strongest animals at the top of the hierarchy, with "authority" to order others around?

Well, those at the top of the hierarchy get the lion's share of all resources (food, mates, territory). They get most resources since that is best for survival of the species. Weak animals are likely to perish in adverse conditions. Even if they had a lot of food they might still perish (the food would have been wasted on them for no good purpose since they died anyway). In fact even the strongest might perish in a severe winter if they didn't have enough food— because they shared it out with the weak ones. So now both weak and strong would die off and the species would go extinct.

A better solution for the animals is to take food from the weak (since they might die anyway with or without extra food) and give it to the strongest (to increase their chance of survival). In that way at least some animals (the strong ones) would survive and the species would carry on. Survival of the fittest is thus the purpose behind the idea of hierarchial arrangements in the animals.

In humans the same type of instincts for organizing into hierarchies come into play. Kings and queens traditionally get most of the resources. But, today, of course they have largely been replaced by a new group of top alpha animals, the millionaires. This includes the CEOs, star actors, musicians and sports figures. These top-of-the-heap humans usually get salaries (ability to get resources like food and mates) that are thousands of times higher than that of an average human.

Plus, as with the animals, when the going gets tough and top-ranked animals get the food, so with corporations when they start losing money (resources) the top-ranked individuals get the resources not the lower ranked animals. For example, a corporation might get rid of (lay off) 1,000s of “low-ranking” workers, whose combined salary might be equal to that of one CEO - while maybe even giving the CEO a bonus.

Put out bird seed in your yard and you will see a few birds, the ones at the top of the pecking order, eating while most stay fearfully on the side. And if any come near the food those eating try to chase them away. You might wonder, since there is enough food for them all, why they don't share. But their instincts won't let them. The top birds feed first. With corporations the CEO feeds first. The top ranked human animals always feed first. And the Marie Antoinettes of the world find that normal. They are helpless captives to their animal instincts that won't let them do otherwise.

Plus this animal instinct, for the high ranked individuals to take most of the resources, seems to be balanced by another instinct in the low ranking individuals, the majority or the masses. This instinct makes the masses ready and willing to let the dominant animals have everything.

In fact the "instinct" to let the high-and-mighty take most of the wealth or resources is so ingrained in us that one broadcaster, Gordon Sinclair, once said "take all the money from the wealthy and distribute it out equally to everyone and within a week the wealthy ones will have it all back again and the poor will be as poor as before." And Bertrand Russel once complained that the ordinary working class person in England actually gets insulted if you even suggest that the King is not worth all the money that taxpayers dole out to support him.

Yet, we must remember that, besides the alpha dominants, the kings and queens and the large masses of willing slaves, there is a third class, the warriors (or rebels). Usually these people, besides defending the group, have another important function: they test the leaders to make sure they are, in fact, the strongest. There is no use in some animal getting all the food if that animal is not really the strongest.

Animals, including humans, thus must have ways to guarantee that those chosen to "survive" are indeed the fittest. Thus the sol-



diers, rebels sit idle most of the time until mating season when they are ready to challenge the leaders to head-butting competitions, to prove to everyone that they are in fact worthy of being at the top of the hierarchy. In humans these warriors lead revolutions (the masses rarely get involved in revolutions) to challenge the kings and if successful (despite cries of liberty, equality, fraternity and so on) then replace the leaders as the new leaders. (See for example how Robespierre and Napoleon replaced King Louis in the French revolution and how Lenin and Stalin replaced Czar Nicholas in the Russian revolution -while the masses just went on farming and working and starving. and enduring the terror of the new leaders.)

Unlike the warriors, the masses are never supposed to challenge leaders. The masses must remain subservient. The lower animals must always remain obedient to the leaders. They must remain cowards. Usually they have a built-in, hereditary instinct that drives them to be cowards before the dominant animals or leaders.

But while the other animals guarantee this servile behavior through instincts, and head-butting fights (fear), humans have added another tool- religion. Religion in most societies seems to function to guarantee obedience to the leaders.

In that sense Christian philosophy is very animalistic. It teaches lower class animals to be obedient to the upper class animals. In fact, early Christianity drew members mostly from the slaves of Rome, and the women, who in those days were hardly better than slaves. Then, throughout the middle ages they continued to enroll the peasants (while often getting into conflicts with the aristocrats). And today the largest percent of Catholics comes from the poor and uneducated in the developing countries.

So besides indoctrinating the masses with the “virtues” of obedience, meekness, humility (not making any trouble for the aristocrats) and with the idea that they can’t “just do it” on their

own but must beg (pray) for what they need from king and god, the Catholics must instill one other animal quality into the average person: cowardice. The masses are taught to display a reluctance to take responsibility for any action, a reluctance to stand up to any leader and challenge him.

So to top off the Christian philosophy we are taught that the king-god-lord, out of his concern for you, suffers for you, dies for your “sins.” Imagine that. You do the crime and he does the time. Gutlessness. You aren’t supposed to stand up and “take your medicine.” You sit meekly by, humbly, letting someone else suffer for your sins. Dying on his cross to save you. Cowardice. A philosophy of cowardice.

And what are these “sins” that the king-god is saving you from? The sin of living? The sin of being lower class? The sin of trying to do something for yourself?

In the Bible the great sin in the garden of Eden is that the woman took initiative, wanted to gain wisdom, that is, eat of knowledge.

The god-king told her that if she disobeyed (challenged the king-god) and ate the fruit “she would become like one of us.” That is, if she took responsibility, initiative and became a “doer” and did something on her own (took the fruit) she would also become a king-god, “like one of us.” The great “original sin” in Catholicism is to dare to be a king-god, a person at the top of the hierarchy. In the animal world no lower worker animal is supposed to challenge the upper crust and become a king like them - unless you are born into it as a warrior and rebel.

But does that apply to us today? How can you get anywhere in life if you are a coward, always ready to let someone else take the fruit? Or reluctant to accept possible failure or any blame for what you do? To let others die for you?

The Bible tells us that "the meek shall inherit the earth." How? If you are too meek and humble to do anything, then how can you get anything in life, let alone have the whole earth? Well, no problem, says the church, since in Catholicism (and earlier Christianity) you are not supposed to get anywhere in life. You are supposed to stay meek and at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

The scriptures teach that benefits don't come from your efforts. A person making efforts is a dynamic person, full of initiative, a doer, and so a challenger, a potential threat to the king at the top of the hierarchy. The Christian solution to safe-guarding the animal hierarchy is to indoctrinate the masses into being cowards and praying – begging the king-lord to take care of you (since you aren't supposed to be responsible). Let him do it all (whatever he wants) for you. You are not to take your life into your own hands and act.

Thus it is not surprising to find that no great business tycoon was ever made a Christian "saint." Nor anyone who accomplished much in their life or contributed to the advancement of civilization. Galileo is not a saint. Nor is Copernicus, Newton or Einstein. Instead people like Galileo and Bruno were persecuted. Even honored artists like Michelangelo, Leonardo and Raphael were never made into Christian saints, models for the masses to imitate. They were too full of energy and drive to be put forward as model Christians.

Yet Francis of Assisi was made a saint. And what did he do? He was the antithesis of the merchant. He gave up a life of wealth and walked around barefoot and lived in the open, like a modern hippie or hobo. He was meek, mild, humble and poor. And the top-of-the-heap pope-king smiled on him as a good low-class follower and on his whim threw him the boon of sainthood.

Of course this propaganda, to encourage humility and discourage ambition to become a power in the world, is also found with many Buddhists and Hindus. Swami Tapovanam, for exam-

ple, gave up a life of wealth to wander barefoot around the Himalayas and Swami Sivananda gave up his profession as a physician. And M. Mathieu Ricard gave up a promising career in science for the poverty of the Buddhist monk. They all became modern-day versions of Francis of Assisi.

But, beyond his obedient meekness, was Francis of Assisi a good person? Well, actions speak louder than words. At the time when he lived the Pope was persecuting members of another religion, the Cathars of Albi, in southern France, and this St. Francis didn't utter a peep in protest. He didn't even write the Pope to complain about all the senseless slaughter. To question the horrible torturing and murders would have been to question those at the top of the Christian church hierarchy and he didn't want to do that. He was well trained in Christian cowardice before those in authority, even if it meant setting aside moral notions like "brotherly love" and "do not kill."

Of course, the Pope, the one at the top of the Christian hierarchy, did have the animal "right" to kill anyone he thought might challenge his base of power. Plus he had the precedent of Bible stories to back up his murders.

For example Moses (in Numbers, xxxi, 10) slaughtered many thousands in battle, slew the enemy kings, and burned cities, towns and villages (Numbers, XXXI, 10) and made off with all their farm animals and goods (Numbers, XXXI, 9). Then, when the fighting was over and his men asked him what to do about the captives, his answer was bloody. The married women were to be killed (Numbers, xxxi, 17). The male children were to be killed (Numbers, XXXI, 17). The unmarried, female children were to be taken as slaves and concubines for his soldiers (Numbers, xxxi, 18). In fact, Moses was "angry" that his soldiers had not already done these sorts of things on their own (Numbers, XXXI, 14).

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Of course, the god of Moses (or rather his priests) got a cut of the spoils of the war. But that doesn't excuse the horror of what Moses did. Today we would have someone like Moses brought before the World Court for war crimes. We would put him in jail for the rest of his life for his genocide.

But Moses would defend his genocide as "just." He was a King and those at the top of the animal hierarchies always feel, by instinct, their animal-based "right" to kill whatever animals they like, all competitors, all who would challenge their status as the "fittest" to survive.

So Francis of Assisi probably also felt, following the example of Moses and the other animals, that it was just fine for the Pope to murder innocents. Likewise, Francis of Assisi would probably also have justified it by recalling the Bible story of Jephthah, who (in Judges, XI,31 and XI,39 ) made a human sacrifice of his female child to god.

Or maybe Francis just had too much cowardice hammered into him. Or was afraid (another low-class trait) of the "Holy Terror" or Inquisition that was ever ready to murder any who stood up and questioned the Pope's authority. Bravery and self-initiative, so prized today, was not part of medieval Christianity.

In fact, the masses were even further discouraged from wanting to be like the kings and gods by implying that those at the top really suffer. What a false message. It ignores the reality that the workers and slaves suffer much more than those at the top – the martyrs who "do it for you." Imagine that. The Kings and gods are suffering for our sake – and you thought the peasants were starving and beaten by their lords. Oh no, says the church. It is the kings who suffer.

Of course the intention is to stop you from ever desiring to rise to the top. Those at the top suffer in their own way. The demands of leadership are terrible. And they, in their goodness, do it for

your sake. They bear a cross for you. By rights they should toss you slimy peasants to the lions but because of the largeness of their hearts they put up with you and your “sinful” ways. They bear a cross for your salvation. The kings and gods must pay the price of your sins. Not you. They must do and die. Not you. What a horrible life they live. Aren't you ashamed of how you make them "suffer" for your sake - let alone wanting to be like them?

But, you, yes you, you don't want to suffer as they did too, do you? Oh no. Not like the kings. The top of the heap is a place of suffering. Let them suffer. Let the kings take the cross. You better stay away from that. After all, they are doing it (amassing wealth or resources, and having many children in their harems) for you!

But, for us at least, this sort of (unacknowledged) message from the Catholic church, while perfectly in line with animal urges, was quite objectionable. We found quite disgusting the rule that authorities tell the masses what to do. Authorities tell the masses what to believe in. And the corollary was worse: that the masses must say to the authorities, “yes sir, tell me what to do.” The masses say to the authorities, “just tell me what to believe in.”

Of course this Catholic philosophy, a thinly disguised version of animal behavior and abidance by the rules of animal hierarchies, is disputed by many modern-day Christians. They instead maintain that Christianity is rather a philosophy of brotherly love.

But that is only because they confuse it with the doctrine of Liberal Humanism (equality, freedom, dignity for all, human rights, welfare of all and so on), that started around the time of the Renaissance.

For example, Jesus said nothing against the idea of slavery. Slavery has almost always been a part of human history and was

rampant in the Roman Empire where Christianity arose. Yet there is no preaching against it in all the Christian scriptures.

Only long after the rise of Humanism, when England took a long look at the evils of industrialism and the suffering of “humans”, was slavery abolished in the west. Sure, a few Christian preachers got involved in the abolition movement – but because they were Humanists, not because they were Christians.

If they had only been Christians they would likely not have objected to slavery. Christians used slaves for thousands of years. In fact in the Bible epistle called 1 Timothy 6:1 it says "Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of god and the teachings may not be defamed." That is, to desire to end slavery is to insult the Christian god. Colossians 3:33 states: "Slaves, obey in everything those who are your masters," and Titus 2:9 asks "slaves to be submissive to their masters."

And, of course, in the old testament it is worse. In Leviticus 25:44 we read, "Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves." And verse 45 continues, telling us to buy the children of those who visit with you, to be your *possession*, while verse 46 adds that these child slaves can be an inheritance to your own children. Exodus 21:7 also tells of men who sell their daughters into slavery. Only after the rise of Humanism did Christians object to slavery. The American Civil War, when the slaves were “freed,” (but not made equals in American society) was only about 150 years ago.

And women were little better than slaves for much of Christian history. Again, Jesus said nothing about giving equal rights for women. Is that proper for a god who supposedly knows everything and who can see thousands of years into the future, who would (supposedly) know how that ideal would be honored in the future? If he was for "love" would he not have thought it proper

to, at least, prepare the future humans for accepting equality of and love for "all."

Instead, in its earliest history, Christianity often forbade women from going to the altar. Christian men like Jerome, who basically gave us the present form of the Bible, hated women. And the bishop of Alexandria, or maybe just monks under his control, murdered women like Hypatia, a noted philosopher and mathematician – for no obvious reason except that she was a woman who was smarter than any of the male church hierarchy.

Today some women complain that they are still not allowed to be Catholic priests. Only men can be priests. Why? No reason. Christianity just did not allow them to be priests. Yet that is like nothing compared to the past treatment of women by the church.

Today we pride ourselves on our family values. We honor the trinity of father, mother and child. But the ancient church, developing in a man-driven setting, decided that only father and son should be honored as "gods." The mother, or woman, was demoted to a mere "holy spirit." Some people might wonder why they didn't toss out the father and keep the mother, but two thousand years ago the strong bias in favor of males was even stronger than it is today. Of course, the extremely ancient mother worship still continued, and church members still prayed to the Mother, but it just was no longer part of the uppermost Christian "trinity" of gods, or god hierarchy of the male priests.

Because women today can vote and have "almost equal" pay with men, many forget that for 2000 years women were not equal to men in Christian lands. Only after the rise of Liberal Humanism did women get a vote. The Suffragette movement (voting rights for women) started only a little over a hundred years ago. New Zealand, the first to grant a vote to women, did so in 1893. In England women got the right to vote only in 1918 – about 100 years ago. (But some say this was not because of Humanism but because of the war (WW I) and done to encourage the much



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needed participation of women in the war effort – when the men were being slaughtered by the tens of thousands at a time).

So, to repeat for emphasis, Christianity, for nearly 2000 years, did nothing to encourage equal rights for women or to abolish human slavery. Is this “brotherly love?” This idea of “fraternity of all men” came only after the rise of the philosophy of Humanism. Likewise the recognition of rights for the disabled is an even more recent result of Humanism that is also not mentioned in the Bible.

The fact that modern Christianity adopted much of Humanism into their religion is good. But we should not forget that this was not part of their original philosophy.

Nor should we forget that you can be a Humanist without being a Christian.

Humanism is a modern movement. Christianity belongs to the ancient past, the horrible past, the age of animals walking on two legs, when obedience to the lord, king or god was supremely important and when cowardice, not being full of ambition and a potential threat to the king, was important.

Thus, while we accepted Humanism, as most modern folk do, we had to reject Christian philosophy. We did not wish to pursue a philosophy steeped in animalism. We wanted a philosophy that encouraged the idea that humans can evolve to greater things than those seen among the animals. So we had to rebel and leave our Catholic roots.

And that decision to abandon Catholicism was strengthened even more for us when we also realized that there was no personal experience to be gained in Christian rituals. One went to church and watched. The priest did everything for you at the front of the church - in accordance with the philosophy of letting him work and suffer, while you remain only a beggar.

Then one went home from church and tried to practice the principles of poverty, meekness, letting others run over you (turning the cheek), looking for rewards not from what you've done but from what you expect god to dole out to you through your begging. And of course, to practice the prime virtue of cowardice – being afraid to act.

Church service was a perfect duplication of the Christian philosophy of putting your fate in the hands of your “superiors” in the hierarchy.

Yet we also knew that many people didn't balk at the Christian philosophy. Maybe they just didn't bother to think it through. Maybe they just had never studied animal behavior. But, for whatever reason, they didn't think the Christian philosophy was nonsense. They only rebelled because they had become modern humanists.

And as humanists they wanted freedom and the right to experience things on their own. They didn't like the idea of a priest doing everything in a church. They didn't like the idea of the priest standing between man and god and telling us what god wanted us to do. They wanted to meet god themselves. They wanted a personal “mystical” experience. So off they went, in revolt, from Catholicism and Christianity, running to the glitzy glamour of shiny mystical cults and oriental religions.

They didn't stop to think whether the oriental and mystical cults were really any better than the Christian cults that they left behind. It was enough that these new religions were different. And they had a promise to look forward to: a personal experience of god, whatever that is. The new age cults promised them that experience of god was possible. They looked forward to a big improvement over traditional Christian religions where god is to bowed to, flattered, worshiped and begged from, (as with any old time king) but never looked at. With the new age religions it was promised that, through methods like meditation, they could look

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god in the eye and see the center of the cosmic in the belly of the mind.

Of course, we also knew that many Christians in the west were fleeing their birth religions for other reasons than abhorrence of the Christian philosophy and the priest-centered rituals. Most of these people, by birth indoctrination, were Protestants and not Catholics.

While Catholicism, as an earlier form of Christianity, was a religion for the poor, the meek, the obedient, the slaves and the gutless, the later Protestantism, that started in the Reformation, about 500 years ago, turned away from that and became a religion for the merchants.

This happened since just before the time of the reformation the Europeans had developed a large merchant class that challenged the church cults of poverty for the masses and riches for the aristocrats, especially the aristocrats of the church. Making money seemed good to these new merchant classes but yet the church preached that wealth was bad unless you were born an aristocrat. What to do?

Fortunately the church led the way out of the dilemma of how god would condemn human masses to poverty and yet allow the church and the new merchants to relish wealth. (The medieval church officials had picked up the merchant spirit of gathering wealth through sales, by selling indulgences, that is passes out of purgatory into heaven. Purgatory was of course a newly invented idea like the "pet rock" or other schemes of the modern gimmick sellers.)

When some aristocrats heard of the indulgence idea they immediately salivated. The merchants also wanted a share of that profit. German princes like Frederick, Elector of Saxony, thought it a great shame to let all that good German money, gathered by selling indulgences, go off to Rome. So in 1526 he seized church

property (churches, monasteries) and grabbed a share of the church revenues. Later he got the Emperor, Charles 6<sup>th</sup>, to side with him and they invaded Rome to get the pope to sign on the dotted line to cede them the German revenues. (To which the Pope agreed, since he had no other choice, while keeping his fingers double-crossed).

After that, to use a pun, all hell broke loose. The idea of grabbing a piece of the church pie spread like wild fire throughout Europe. The king in England, Henry 8<sup>th</sup>, almost immediately grabbed church lands and revenues and declared himself head of his own church.

Later on, of course, the histories were rewritten to explain the seizures of church property and revenues in terms of doctrinal self-righteousness. Stories only the gullible masses could believe were invented. So the king of England was said to have seized the lands of the churches because the Pope refused to grant him a divorce. What nonsense. Someone refuses you a divorce so you don't just do it anyway – you grab all their lands and revenues. Does that make sense? (Only if the king in England thought he was equal to the Pope, having just as high a position in the animal hierarchy).

And what about the German princes who invaded Rome to make the Pope sign away the church revenues to them? Was that because they didn't like the idea of those revenues? Because they didn't like the idea of making money from selling indulgences? Only an imbecile could fall for that sort of explanation. Even Martin Luther, who, 7 years before Frederick's money-grab, complained about selling indulgences, would have been just another troublemaker ignored by the church, forgotten to history, if he hadn't fallen in step with the spirit of taking over church revenues and setting up your own church. Today we see the same thing when a disgruntled employee leaves a corporation and sets up his own competing company.

At its heart Protestantism was started by people who wanted money. Throughout its history it was supported by the Merchants. This had a great influence on Christianity, driving it away from being a religion of the hierarchy, a religion devoted to keeping the poor quiet and obedient, and toward becoming a religion of free enterprise.

Once in America, the religion of “controlling” the poor masses, the original Christianity, that had become the religion of the merchants, Protestantism, continued this trend away from an emphasis on animal hierarchies and toward dynamic, go-getting selling. In America, Christianity soon became the religion of success – a suitable religion for the land of “rags to riches.”

The Newer American Protestant religions (which are as much like ancient Christianity as an apple is like an orange) even incorporated the American techniques for advertising and sales. They use television shows to sell, sell, sell. They sell books, videos and trinkets holy. They proclaim, “god wants you to be rich.”

In fact the television preachers are so good at selling technique that those watching them just cough up money as if it were spit-  
tle. We know of one invalid lady in Toronto, unable to leave her house, who every week sent checks off to assorted television evangelists. It cost her hundreds of dollars a month (and in those days the broadcasts were weekly, not daily as we have now). Yet she also complained that none of those preachers, nor any of their associates ever came to visit her. All she got was the books and trinkets she bought from them - with included inserts that requested even more money.

Of course the scenario is not as dismal as it sounds since, in America, everyone has a right to go on television and become a preacher. Everyone has a right to success. Everyone has a right to be rich – some of the broadcasts even proclaim that “god wants you to be rich.”

Likewise, in the land of Humanism, the land of freedom and civil “rights,” everyone has a right to read books on selling and success. Indeed, the selling of books on success is one obvious feature of the American tel-evangelist broadcasts.

And we can’t forget that in American Christianity the emphasis in prayer has been altered. In the older Christianity god was an old time king (tyrant, head of the animal hierarchy) who one begged (prayed to) for a favor. And the king-god might or might-not, on his whim, grant you a benefit, heal your sickness or financial trouble.

But when god ceased being modeled on the old-time kings and instead became a “savior” of the people a great problem was seen. Why did god have to save you?

That is, why couldn’t god just prevent you from falling into hard times? If god was all-knowing and all-powerful then why didn’t he just prevent you from getting, say, Polio, so he wouldn’t have to come along later and “save” you from Polio? Wasn’t it the king’s job to look after his kingdom? So why did the god-king let you get sick and poor and uneducated? (In animal hierarchies of course we know that the answer is because he didn’t care. Those at the top of the animal hierarchies, feel a “right” to take all the resources so that they live and you die. And besides that, they want you weak so you won’t be much of a challenger to those at the top of the hierarchy).

Well an answer that satisfied the new Humanism stirring in Christians was provided by the model of the merchant. In the business world success comes because of both initiative and skill at manipulating others to buy. So, if God was not a king but rather a business tycoon, then he would have to respect other people with business skills. He would smile on those who, like him, showed initiative, drive, perseverance and sales skill.

This means that if you are poor or unhealthy then according to the new model of god as tycoon, it is your own fault, not god's fault. You just didn't have the initiative to go out and make yourself a success in the great American way. Instead, through laziness or lack of knowledge of how to do it, you let yourself fall into despair, alcoholism, drug addiction, poverty and disease. It happened from "your" personal laziness to clean yourself and take care of yourself. Or a stupidity that let you get taken in by the drug dealers sales pitch. Or your refusal to keep strong. Or a personal weakness in giving in to animal urges like sex and letting that drain your energies when you should have been off selling shoes. (But some religious thinkers who can't shake off the old ways still proclaim it is the work of the devil and not a personal fault of their own).

So prayer was no more about begging help from god-kings but now more like asking a venture capitalist or investor for some extra help. You could pray to the god-investor, "I screwed up. I let myself become a drug addict or an alcoholic or a womanizer. Or I let myself get sick through bad diet, not exercising, not sleeping enough, getting stressed out. So can you lend me some health, at 5% interest, till I get better?"

In the new American Christian model God didn't let you get sick. In the great American Success tradition you made a bad move and bankrupt your health. While an old time king-god might only help on a whim, or if it pleases him, now the savior tycoon-god can help – provided you are ready to make a donation to the tel-evangelist as payment for services rendered.

And much of American Christianity, as seen on television, is outrageously commercial and materialistic. The preachers wear expensive suits of clothes. They see no shame in repeatedly asking the viewers for money.

And their followers, as ever, are just as interested in begging. But now the ante is higher. A new car? New house? New or

higher paying job? Elimination of cancer? Ask god-tycoon and he might invest in you – help you straighten out your life, the life you, not he, damaged. The only condition is that you must pay him back on time and with interest.

But, of course, god is now considered a bit of a sucker and bad at judging human financial needs (wasting most of his early years with destroying cities or overturning tables and not with running a business), and so is not as sharp as his modern worshippers. So the payback for his help is usually quite trivial. In return for a new car you may just have to burn a candle or maybe buy a few books or donate a few hundred dollars to some television minister.

However we have met a few modern American Christians who want it both ways: they want the features of both the older god-king religion and the newer god-tycoon religion. But they can't have both. God-king, the head of the animal hierarchy, wants you to remain a loyal, meek, begging servant while god-tycoon wants you to rise up in life, grab success and be richer than any king ever was. This is why, adjusted for the sizes of each group, more Protestants than Catholics are CEOs and business leaders.

But this turning of churches into money making businesses has turned many away from them -usually people who don't believe religion should be a business. They reject the religion of their birth, not because they object to myths being treated as if they were true history, nor because they dislike the (earlier) philosophy of meekness, and turning-the-cheek (giving up and giving in) and obedience to priests, but because they don't like the overemphasis on money-making and selling. Nor the life the new blended religion of Christianity-Humanism-Merchandizing proposes they should reach for: success, money, high paying jobs, fast cars, big houses, fancy vacations, constant shopping trips, lavish luxuries and the latest technical gizmos. That is, they don't



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like the modern churches. They don't like the modern world, the modern way of life – materialism.

Though the majority of people in the west (or rather, really, in the modern world) do love the lifestyle, a few hate it. So those people who reject their childhood environment in the land of success, the religion of business, the religion of materialism, the new Christianity, hope for a real “spiritual” religion elsewhere. And head off to something different: The east.

There in the developing countries of the east they can return to what Christianity once was. There they find the old fashioned religions of poverty still flourishing. There they find swamis who still know how to live barefoot, walk around half-naked or wear only a loin cloth or a one-piece gown (and have that as their only possession). There they find gurus and monks who know how to live in caves, and starve and disdain the “materialism” of the west.

But some who flee the modern religions of the west don't really like the poverty of the east since, after all, they grew up in splendor and luxury, and with the ability to buy whatever they wanted. So, instead they head away from the new money religion cults of the modern protestant west and off to the non-material or spiritual, whatever that means, religions and cults of western spiritualism.

These spiritualism cults are somewhat paradoxical since while they still honor money making they reject a material way to do it. Money, health, friends are all to be made, not by sweat but by spiritual methodology. Visualization.

For example, a follower of spiritualism does not take material drugs, and help the money-making drug corporations, but rather uses spiritual methods: one visualizes health. Or blows it into oneself by breathing. Or sings it into oneself by chanting mantras. One does not get a job by physically knocking on doors or attend-

ing conventions and “networking,” but instead lets the job come to them, by sitting at home and visualizing yourself receiving money.

Of course these religions which have this merchant-spiritualism blend also know that science is part of the modern picture. The merchant class of the time of the Renaissance and Reformation in Europe knew that science was a good ally against the poverty philosophy of the old catholic church. Science could beat up the church for them. And science could also provide them with newer, better ways to make even more money.

So many of the new age religions of the west take a scientific tone. You are told to practice in the manner of a true scientists. You do experiments (say gaze at a candle or look at a match floating in a bowl of water) like scientists do and try to affect the “results” with your spiritual “mind.” And, like scientists, you observe carefully and draw conclusions (usually that the methods don’t work) – though most ignore the conclusions and prefer, despite negative results, to believe in what they fervently want to believe in, in spirits.

It is a glittering attraction. Science and materialism and merchandising, selling and money-making all combined with old world spirituality, superstition and religion. And the chance for mystical or rather spiritual experiences – the thrill of soaring through the sky in astral bodies (who needs to take a jet for a fancy vacation trip) or projecting the soul toward your competitors (enemies) to subtly change their minds about you or your business.

In a sense many of those in the new age spiritual cults are no different than those in the modern American protestant churches. Both believe in spiritual forces. And not many of them really want the old fashioned values of adoring poverty, meekness and humility. They want god, or spirits, or their own soul, or the cosmic mind, or whatever, to get them material success. Both church

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goers and new-agers live in the midst of the materialism in the west and both want to be part of it.

We knew an older gentleman, involved heavily in one of the born-again christian movements, who told us how god was looking after him. He needed money and so, one day, money just appeared in his postal box. That doesn't sound too different from the story of the new-ager who told us he visualized a new car and, sure enough, before long the spiritual forces brought one to him.

Yet there is a big difference in that new-agers usually believe that science and technology are wonderful disciplines while many American Christians look down on science, especially any science that shows ideas of the Bible are in error. While they like god-king and god-tycoon they distrust god-scientist – probably because they think god-scientist might one day show himself to be scientifically impossible.

But many new-agers like science, especially the scientific idea of doing experiments. It adds a dazzling attraction to Rosicrucianism, for example, to speckle it with experiments. Is psychokinesis (mind controlling matter) true? Then float a match in a bowl of water and see if you can move it toward your hands without touching the water. Do you have an aura around you? Then gaze at your self in a mirror and see if you can detect one.

But other new-agers are happy just to apply the technology, developed by science in activities like ghost searches. Or looking for healing energy emanating from finger tips. Or trying to measure if the stars do affect you.

Still, spiritualism and the so-called New Age cults, and even the modern American Merchant Christianity, are all alike in one way. They all still depend, for the “truth” of their beliefs, on authorities.

An old style Christian who believes strongly in spirits and devils rather than physical forces might argue that they are not at all like the new age spiritual cults since those people are working with the devil, the bad spirits, while he is working with angels, the good spirits. But who says that the spiritualists are bad and you are good? Only the authorities of your church. They can rant all they want against the others yet they only believe they are right, and the others wrong, on the say-so of the authorities of their church who make them believe what they want them to believe.

People who are really no different than anyone else, designate themselves as masters and experts in the spiritual or religious and then feel they have a right to promulgate their ideas to others, and to indoctrinate others with their views.

But none of those “authorities,” whether modern Christians or modern new age spiritualists have any proof to back up what they teach to others. They only can back up their views by pointing to other authorities, past and present, who have similar ideas. But truth is not decided by majority vote of a million cult members nor by vote of a few leaders at some closed-door convention or enclave.

Some new-agers, though, claim they have their own proof in the countless experiments they have done at home over the years. All the science-like exercises of breathing and candle gazing.

But we did assorted spiritual exercises for over 20 years and had nothing to show for it. No results.

Well, actually, at the time we thought we had results. We thought we had proven the various theories about auras and cosmic energy and so on. But when we look back on it we realize we had only been fooling ourselves. The mind fooling itself. Placebo effects. Wishful thinking. Self-fulfilling prophecies.

Would a real scientist put up with repeated experiments that don't show the anticipated or expected results? Imagine doing twenty years of dropping apples and never finding any of them falling to the ground. Never getting any proof of gravity. Imagine twenty years of putting magnets near iron nails and never seeing any nails move. Never gaining proof of magnetism. Imagine twenty years of mixing salt in water and never seeing the salt disappear into the water (dissolve).

Yet some spiritualists (in complete agreement with the modern success-is-yours philosophy) tell us that the fault is ours. The catch is that you have to "believe" to receive. We didn't believe and that is why we didn't experience the results we should have. But they tell us they did. Even though they could never show us. And, of course, that made us think that their claims were just efforts to show they were better spiritualists than us, that is, higher on the occultist hierarchy.

Yet this method of claiming "your doubt prevented the desired results" is common with most spiritual groups but nonsense with scientists. You can doubt it all you want but an apple will still fall to the ground when you release it.

But the supposedly science-inspired experimenting occultists throw out this bad logic as a way to protect anyone from proposing that their beliefs are wrong. Christians scriptures also claim that god will never appear to you if you doubt it. So they use the same manipulative methods to keep you from thinking their belief is baseless.

Spiritualists tell us that the doubt of participants prevents the spirits from showing themselves at seances. (Poor shy spirits). Does the doubt of his pupils prevent a chemist from setting fire to hydrogen gas. No. He wants to prove to all, even the "doubters" that it does work. Not so with the spiritualists.

Even the spiritual teachings are held back from doubters. A popular saying is that “When the pupil is ready, only then will the master appear.” Meaning that you just don’t see the results you should, or rather must see, as all the rest of them do, because you are not ready. It is all your fault. Your faith is not strong enough. We don’t need faith to show that solid salt disappears when placed in water, but, strangely, we do need faith for the experiments of spiritualists. Spiritual experiences are different than all other phenomena known to man in that demand for faith – and no spiritualist can explain way that is the case. But, probably, they know it is only a ruse to hide the fact that their experiments don’t work as they say they do.

So, after waking up to the reality, and the tricks, of the spiritual movement, we found ourselves in a bind. We had revolted against what we thought of as the bad philosophy of the church and ran off to search for something better. We ran away from childhood fantasies only to then find that our rebellious teenage search took us to just more fantasies.

Sometimes we had to wonder, “is there any truth?” Or, is there even such a thing as truth? Is it all just trickery. Or more evidence of the persistence and ubiquitous nature of the animal hierarchies – people everywhere trying to make themselves authorities, top dogs in the spiritual world, and gather followers to idolize them.

It’s not that we wanted to prove that we were “right” and the old ways, the parent-induced ways, the priest drilled-into-you ways, were “wrong.” We just wanted something that would make us happy – happy meaning an easing of the pain of looking constantly for truth.

But this definition of being happy means that we fully expected to find some truth one day. Settling on some “truth” means you accept somebody’s views as true. And that could only have arrived from some new authority. So we weren’t really free of hierarchies and authorities at all if we expected somehow that

someone would appear to hand us the truth and we would then be happy. It is no different than saying to someone, "tell me what to believe in."

The teenage mind, the mind that rejects the old and desires after the glittering new, really led us nowhere new at all, just to more of the same: authorities wishing to mentally brainwash you to their unfounded notions. That is, spiritual cults were as much of a sham as christian cults and all we seemed to be doing was running to "newer" authorities who wanted to beat you into believing their systems, just as the old authorities did.

But the kicker came when we saw "advanced" masters, gurus and swamis who refused to answer valid questions, just as priests had often refused to answer our questions, or bluffed answers. Some thought it indignant of us to have asked them a question. Who dares to approach the exalted swami and question what he tells you? Are you assaulting the hierarchy?

We even experienced people in high positions in various new-age groups taking each other to court- a new replacement for the old animal battles where mountain sheep smash their heads together. What use then was all that searching and running around in circles in the mazes of spiritualism and eastern mysticism if it was hardly better than our birth religion? If all the "teachings" were just "weapons" in the battle for hierarchial position?

At most it only trained us to be careful. And critical. And, therefore, it kept alive in us a sense of the value of science, of experimenting.

But, even though we had tried and become disenchanted with the occult groups, we were not ready to call it quits. We were still not ready to stop running after truth. This was because we hoped that, since most of the new-agers "borrow" ideas from religions of the orient – Sufism, Vedanta, Buddhism –that maybe those eastern people really did know something we didn't in the West.

Maybe a book written by some old Rosicrucian from the protestant reformation is a little low on evidence. Maybe some Martinist from the French Revolution is off in his logic. But that didn't mean that nobody, somewhere, didn't have truth. Surely, many people don't know how to weigh evidence, observe carefully and record accurately, or don't know how the human mind can trick itself, but that didn't mean that there weren't really knowledgeable people in the east. Or maybe, perhaps, in the orient they were smarter people.

Rebellious teenagers don't give up their new life easily. If their parents wear long hair, and they revolted to short hair, they won't easily go back to looking like mommy and daddy. So those who run off to new cults (Christianity was once a new cult) won't desert their new "authorities," those new people telling them what to believe, and return to the authorities of their childhood. Human pride and stubbornness keeps teenage searchers devotedly stuck with their new authorities.

And who doesn't want to think that there might really be more to life than sitting in a church or worshipping some king-god? Who doesn't wish for some spiritual world? Some after-death life? Or, that one doesn't really have to work, much, but instead can just sit there and visualize success, or pray their way into union with god or meditate their way into the cosmic mind?

Plus, we knew that spiritual exercises do give you feel-good feelings. Meditation takes away stress (a physical ailment). Meditation relaxes the muscles (physical things). Meditation clears the mind (the brain) and helps you see more clearly, and maybe get better marks in school. By being more relaxed. Perhaps the eastern masters had greater insights into such things?

But can spiritual exercises produce a mystical merging into god, or into the absolute or into the cosmic or cosmic mind? Who says such things are possible? Eventually one realizes there is no valid evidence for such things. They are just leftover ideas from



our earlier childhood indoctrination. As loyal Christians we believed in god, without clearly knowing what that meant, and now as rebellious new-agers, we borrowed that old god idea of our childhood but augmented it with the notion of merging with that god for a first-hand experience. So the whole mystical theory is based on the earlier god theory of the childhood religions. All that happened was that new unfounded beliefs, merging mystically, got added to the old unfounded beliefs, in gods and angels and spirits.

When we saw that nothing comes from following such unfounded notions piled on top of each other then we realized that all our mystical efforts were pure vanity. All that we really got to show for it was the feel-good feelings bouncing around in the mind when you relax in meditation.

Yet, if we think about it, business people also feel good when they do business. Musicians feel good when they play instruments or sing or compose. Or de-compose. Actors feel good when performing on stage. Athletes feel good after exercise. Fans feel good when they swoon before their heroes. And the masses of people feel good when they merge into a television program. (And there's a real feel-good feeling that goes with merging-in).

So it's only to be expected that spiritual seekers should also feel good about spiritual questing. It's just that, contrary to what spiritual authorities pretend, there is no evidence of any spiritual lands or experiences (after death or otherwise) or spiritual states – other than the personal firing of nerves in your brain that produce feel-good feelings.

Of course, on hindsight, we should have expected our teenage revolt against childhood fantasies to have produced nothing dramatically wonderful. After all we left a land of authority and sailed off only to another land of authority. We chose a new philosophy that still had all the vestiges of the old philosophy – belief is spiritual things. And we had still expected some “author-

ity,” the dominant member of the new spiritual group, to tell us what-is-what. So teenager-mind-type people, rebelling against authority, rejecting the brain-washing of their childhood, still ultimately end up, after a long search into spirit-land, with more of the same bunk. Just with a new color to it.

Unfortunately we also saw many fellow teenager-mind-types lining up to adore authorities just as music fans line up to swoon before their rock star. Some new-agers worship their cult leader, their master, their guru just as others worship their boss or their priests. A few think their swamis are gods. Some get sexually abused by their swami just as others, who stayed fixed to childhood fairy tales, get sexually abused by their priest, or their boss at work. Some get mentally beaten up by their sacred leader and give up thinking for themselves just as others, materialists, might get intimidated by the sermons of their minister.

So it seems that everywhere we look we can't escape the fact that all we find is baseless drivel, spouted by people whose only goal is to gain a social following in which he or she can be on top of the heap, at the head of the hierarchy. Call it a boss, a guru, swami, leader or politician, they are all just top dog animals who want you to follow them. And everywhere we look we still see that 90% of the herd of followers go along meekly with what the guru, swami, priest, preacher, minister, politician, boss, slave owner, lord or master wants.

And we still see a few rebels or warriors fighting the system, attacking those at the top of the hierarchy, showing they are not “fit” to lead. For example they try to show how some swami molests boys or produces stage magic to trick people into thinking he produces golden balls from his mouth. And to what purpose? So they can get the job, or replace the one at the high position on the hierarchy.

Of course, sometimes they don't want to replace the one in the dominant position in the hierarchy they attack. They just want to

assure themselves of their high position in their own new hierarchy of rebels. They want to be a “noted, and famous” debunker, cynic, skeptic and exposé of frauds, and be admired by all their skeptic or doubting followers who read their magazines, blogs and web site content.

Yet the debunkers are no different than those they attack. Often they have no support for their comments, no basis for their counter theories. Or the counter-theories used in their attacks may be nonsense. The only thing they really have is the admiration of their followers, those who read their skeptical comments. They still want positions in hierarchies- to be at the top of a group of fans – those who read their debunking thoughts.

It seems to us now that religion is not the way that will take humans to a higher stage in evolution. We humans cannot evolve away from the condition that we share with most other animals, that of fitting ourselves into hierarchies. Whether you want to be admired for your top-notch, top-of-the-pack, knowledge in occultism or in skepticism, you are still looking for an honored place among your followers. It is still just social positioning behavior. Animal behavior. Live like the animals, die like the animals. There is certainly nothing spiritual in doing what the animals do – being top dog in some “spiritual” group.

And we know about the actions-speak-louder-than-a-bunch-of-doctrines reality of new-age groups. That is because we had “risen up” in the ranks of some of the occult or new-age groups. We became officers in many “spiritual” organizations and even masters of lodges. And we got acquainted with the international leaders of many organizations – and saw first hand how they loved to dominate others (a basic animal urge) when they weren’t pursuing some “fans” sexually. Well, those at the top of a Elephant Seal group do get to have a whole harem for themselves. And often ordinary members also came out to meetings more to

find sexual mates for the night then to explore their spiritual "essence."

We can't say we found any spiritual group where animal drives, urges and tendencies didn't outweigh spiritual pursuits most of the time. Or where jealousy, anger, hatred and envy didn't color events. One group seemed to go on for years, despite changes in officers, with meetings that turned into one angry fight after another. In general, we found mostly physical, animal behavior in most of the spiritual groups we frequented. And, by contrast, little evidence of any spiritual activity, whatever that means.

Finally we had to ask ourselves if we would find it different with the eastern philosophies. We wondered whether oriental systems would also prove to be just a lot of doctrinal bluff and nonsense used to hide its real nature as a way to enforce human hierarchies.

We had already had enough dealings with spiritual bluff. We were ready to tone down our teenage revolt, (the emotional, hormone-driven search for truth that transcends believing what priests tell gullible children and yet is still childlike in its acceptance of fantasies and dreams), and head off into adulthood, where one settles in to a logical existence where one believes (for practical reasons) only what one sees or experiences.

Yet we didn't want to be the type of adult who was just an adult-based photocopy of the blind, gullible, myth-believing child they had once been. We didn't want to go back to conformity and traditional beliefs, myths, legends and obedience to the animal hierarchy of the church of our childhood. We wanted to be a real, logical, unemotional adult - what adult can be emotional in front of their children? So we chose to look at those eastern, or oriental, philosophies/religions that had a dry, cold logical basis to them and claims to methods for practical experience of the teachings.

## **Chapter 3. Adult years, or becoming intellectual and level-headed**

It was lucky for us that groups like the Rosicrucians emphasized a semi-scientific method of experimenting to test for psychic abilities. By focusing on this experimental approach they kept alive in us the idea of experiments and thus reinforced earlier training we had had in science.

Of course most members didn't think of the Rosicrucian spiritual exercises as science. That is, they didn't think of those exercises as ways to discover if reported occult phenomena or forces did in fact exist, but, instead, they thought that through the exercises they were developing themselves, the way an athlete trains for the Olympics. The idea was that, if an athlete exercises physically to build up physical skill, then they could exercise "spiritually" to build up occult powers that would eventually turn them into cosmic masters. To these members it was all about transforming yourself and not about science.

But that idea of turning yourself into an occult "master" is not traditional Christian doctrine. It was, in fact, a partial rejection of traditional Christian beliefs of begging favor from a king-god-father, and replacing it by a desire to become god themselves, or at least to merge your being with the being of god. So the learning

was away from childhood “church Christianity” toward a Christianized mysticism and occultism.

In that sense all these Western “mystics” reminded us of so many teenagers since the teenage years are a time of (partial or limited) rebellion against the beliefs of childhood and the rules forced into you by adults. We say that it is only a “partial” or incomplete rejection of the ways of their parents because a teenager will never fully reject parental ways. For example, just as most teenagers, while trying to be “different” from parents, still wear clothing and sport hairstyles. If the parents have short hair they grow long hair and if the parents have long hair they go in for short hair, or even baldness. Likewise they go out for their own style of music, perhaps finding the parental music not “cool” enough, just as their parents in turn had rejected the music of their own parents.

And in the same way, though teenagers decide to no longer attend church services of their parents but instead go for some new age cult, they still retain the idea of getting involved in some sort of religious group. And they still, usually, retain their childhood belief in the concept of a god of some sort, though they may shun Christian gods in favor of Tibetan gods or replace a “person-like” god with a cosmic-mind.

Or, while the teenage religion rebels avoid the earlier gods of childhood, the super-parent, kind father, supporting mother, or gift-giving king-gods, they nonetheless adopt something almost the same: cosmic masters or spirit masters or angel guides who are there to guide us through life. As if we can’t run our own life by ourselves.

And the guardian spirits of the occultists, though looking different from angels and gods, were really the same thing: attempts to hide from reality in a world where parent-like angels, gods or spirits still looked after you.

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The “big difference” seems to be only that childhood gods of conventional religions actually give you physical things: healing, jobs, money and so on, while the new spirit guides and guardian angels of the spiritualist cults only give you advice. They give you knowledge instead of money or health, that is, usually knowledge of how to gain health and money by your own efforts.

The earlier gods of childhood, gods who are just super-parents there to guide or punish disobedient children, or astral-kings there to dole out favors, now became “cosmic masters” or “spirit masters” here to teach us (an intellectual activity). That is, while throwing away much of the “parental” role of provider of food, health and wealth they still kept up the “parental” role of teacher.

Moreover, on hindsight it is now obvious to us that all those psychic organizations and spiritual brotherhoods had been run by authorities, similar to the authorities who ran the old time churches. And, just as church authorities told you what to believe in, many of these occult authorities told you what to believe in. So in effect we had not really moved that far away from traditional religious practices at all. Plus as we ourselves moved up into positions of authority in the psychic organizations we found leaders in the occult groups to be as equally human, as church officials had been, in their weaknesses and vices.

Probably the teenage years are so full of raging emotions and hormones that teenagers don’t stop to adequately analyze where their rebellion might take them or if it is really that different from the belief systems of their parents. It is a time when one throws oneself recklessly, emotionally and carelessly into any cause, any cult, any undertaking as long as it seems different, unusual, or attractive. But, most of all, they want a new cause that “appears” to be anti-establishment. Anything that looks like it holds mysteries that parents and church never explained. Anything that rejects childhood myths (given out by parents).

So for us the spiritual rituals of occultists and spiritualists seemed a very attractive route to take, simply because it dazzled us with the promise of a mystical or deeper understanding of our own religion – that is a deeper understanding than what our parents had. While our parents were content with the dry ceremonies and boring hymn chanting of Catholicism we were discovering the dazzling new vistas and excitement of Mysticism. Previously, in the parental churches, we just sat there and worshiped god, kneeling before him like before a king, or asked him for help, but now with mysticism and cults of spiritual power we could gain first hand experience of god.

Yet, if we had really thought about it we would have realized that the Rosicrucian meetings were actually quite a bit like Christian church services. One still sat there, watched someone at the front perform a ceremony (that was like watching a priest doing his rituals), listened to a lecture ( that was no different than a traditional sermon), chanted mystical mantras (that were surprising like church hymns) and sent off thoughts of peace, healing or gaining wealth to others (which was almost like prayer). Plus we meditated to get closer to the cosmic mind (which is like praying for divine grace from god to descend on you). And, overall, we had just replaced the word “god” with that of “cosmic mind” and had not abandoned this idea of “god” at all. We never questioned if there was or was not a god. So of course we never analyzed what the word “god” meant or even if there was any meaning to the term.

This is why we say that, in hindsight, our rebellion was only partial – it was still limited to being different from, and yet also similar to, the religion of our parents. It just substituted new terminology like cosmic mind and meditation for the old concepts like god, prayer and so on.

Of course, the big difference was in the home studies. Instead of reading scriptures at home about events in the life of Jesus, we



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read mystical monographs about doctrines the churches never discussed much, like the nature of the soul, ESP and Auras and Reincarnation. Yet the real, extremely novel and intriguing part of the whole experience was the home exercises where one got to test those ideas.

There, we were so overwhelmed by the idea of making discoveries that our parents, and our old church priests, had never dreamed of (much less taught), that we usually ignored the fact, at least in the beginning, that all those exercises were not producing any real psychic powers in us at all.

While, in our earlier days as Christians (while limiting the number and extent of such psychic powers) we would call these psychic abilities by names like the powers of the Holy Spirit, or gifts of god, or maybe evidence of the devil, as psychics we called such phenomena the impersonal forces of nature. Plus, while, as Christians we would had to be careful to use our powers of the spirit only to do the work of god ( a servant given a warrant of authority by his king must use that authority only in the service of the king and not for personal aggrandizement), as psychics such powers were just there to be recognized and used if you wanted. They were like other natural forces, such as gravity. You could say you only wanted to use gravity if the lord allowed it or you could say that, as a human, you are free to apply gravity's rules to make your life easier – as in lifting a heavy load of wood onto a truck more easily.

Yet we never had the results that others claimed for any of these psychic powers. So, since we had in our childhood been strong Catholics (and couldn't shake free of the doctrines that had been implanted deep into our subconscious mind) and still believed in god (without bothering to analyze if that term "god" actually made any sense) we slowly shifted our attention away from psychic investigation and onto the mystical part of the studies, the meditation.

But that focus onto the idea of mystical union with god (as practiced by many Christian mystics over the centuries) soon took us to other groups, like the Martinists and the Theosophical Society.

With these groups the character of the meetings was somewhat different from that in conventional churches. Now, besides listening to a sermon or lecture, we had the chance to enter into discussion about their teachings. The topics for discussion, however, still revolved around “spirit” filled philosophy – the ideas of French mystics like L. C. de St. Martin and Papus, the Spanish mystics like Pasquales, the Spanish Kabalists, Russian mystics like Ouspensky, Gurdjeif, Blavatsky, or even Swedenborg - but at least we had the new novelty of active discussion at meetings.

Of course some members, still stuck with traditional ways of blindly believing whatever the cults put forth as doctrine, often took exception to our going too far with our questions and criticism at the meetings. But for us it was exciting to be able to question and critique some of the ideas of past mystics and spiritualists. It seemed so unlike the passive listening and passive ingesting of doctrine and dogma that we had once engaged in at traditional Catholic church services and even at spiritualist cult activities.

But, in fact, this discussion at Martinist meetings was actually a complement to the scientific experiments of the Rosicrucian mystics. Scientists openly discuss their work with others, at conferences and in published papers, and come to agreement about the results- they call it peer-review. Without realizing it, we were actually becoming more and more attuned to a scientific approach to mystical and spiritual phenomena.

Unfortunately even with the Martinists and Theosophists, we usually didn’t have the chance to discuss the results of our own, personal experiments with visualization or meditation. So in that way it was not really a true scientific discussion where everyone

takes shots at the experimental results of others, trying to find holes in their logic or fault in their experimental setups or conclusions. Instead, everybody at the mystical cults just assumed that we all had had positive results with our spiritual exercises at home. If you didn't, then you never thought to question whether anyone else had obtained good results. You just assumed they did and that you probably would also develop your own abilities later, much later. But, of course, after 20 years of practice nothing developed at all.

It was also about this time that we first got interested in the researches of Harry Houdini. He and his brother were famous magicians who had studied magic since they had been kids. They knew all the tricks that the street psychics and occultists used to generate realistic-looking psychic phenomena- since they had perpetrated most of them themselves at one time or another.

Thus it was only natural for Houdini to get himself involved with the research of the Scientific American magazine. This magazine had set up a panel of scientists to investigate psychic phenomena but proposed to do it in the normal scientific way of careful observation. However Houdini knew that, while the scientists might be careful investigators, they were not used to dealing with the purposeful fraud of most street psychics. When you test chemical laws for example you don't have to deal with the possibility that perhaps one of chemicals, say sulfuric acid, in your experiment is trying to defraud you. Houdini told the panel they needed his advice.

Nonetheless, on several occasions the scientists were ready to declare that they had proof of psychic phenomena. Only at the last moment they always called in Houdini to double-check their research and Houdini always, in a matter of minutes, discovered the trick of the psychics.

In fact Houdini was so good at uncovering the psychics that he even lost friends because of this. For example one friend, Arthur

Conan-Doyle, creator of the Sherlock Holmes stories, insisted that Houdini test his wife who he believed to be a genuine psychic. Houdini refused at first. But at last, under continued pressure from Doyle, gave in and agreed to investigate Doyle's wife. Of course Houdini exposed her tricks and methods so quickly that Doyle was enraged that anyone would accuse his wife of fraud, and that ended their friendship.

Plus we had the experience of attendance at the so-called Spiritualist churches to show us that spiritualism was all a trick. For example at one meeting the church “psychic” told my wife that the spirit of her dead daughter was there and wanted to give us a message. But when my wife replied that we had never had a daughter the psychic didn’t give up. He just coughed up the common reply of all the psychics: “you don’t know now, but go home and think about it and you will realize who it is.” It was as if he thought we would suddenly realize that we had in fact had a daughter but had somehow forgotten about it.

More experience of this sort (trying to shift the blame for the psychic’s failures onto you) finally convinced us that psychic phenomena didn’t exist. Even the psychics who lorded it over others, pretending that, while you didn’t have psychic powers, that at least they did, in reality had none. But, of course, they still believed that they did. They firmly believed that, after decades of spiritual exercises, they had developed real abilities. It’s just that there was no objective evidence to support their self-important claims.

As well, we found that the value of prayer or spiritual practices like visualization was not in the practice itself. For example you couldn’t really visualize or pray your way to, say, a better job. It was just that, by behaving as a loyal member of the group, Catholic or Spiritualist, you got favors through other members. For example, if you worked in a Catholic school, you got promotions, or avoided getting fired, by acting and speaking the way a

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“good” Catholic should. Or, if you professed a belief in psychic healing you had a better chance to get hired by someone who also thought this a valid activity – or fired if you mentioned it to a Catholic who thought of it as the “work of the devil.”

So we decided that our lack of success with psychic experiments was likely just proof that no such phenomena existed. It was all just stage magic.

Another way to look at it is to say that, after revolting from the imposed fairy tales of childhood religion with its stories and myths filled with gods and angels and authorities telling you what to believe, we had now revolted in a similar way from the fairy tales of spiritualism.

But that didn’t mean we gave up our involvement with those Western world psychic cults. After all, we still had the enjoyment of active discussions to keep us enthusiastic about the mystical doctrines.

Plus often our group discussions of the ideas of previous mystics usually turned toward pure philosophy. And if we talked about spirits it was usually now not about using spirits or psychic powers to gain health or wealth or so on. We just thought of them as manifestations of the divine power and analyzed them to learn more about how the cosmic forces operated.

So we gradually drifted more and more away from occultism and spiritualism and into philosophy and mysticism. Away from experimenting with auras, psychokinesis, astral travel, reincarnation, psychic healing, esp and psychic powers and onto the possibility of making direct contact with the substratum of the universe, with god if you prefer such a term.

That is, we “rebels” were heading back to the god of our parents, except that we now called it cosmic mind rather than god. Except that we were interested in the “theology” and “philoso-

phy” and “mysticism” rather than in Bible myths and church rituals.

So we still felt “rebellious” since our parents and priests had never bothered with such esoteric things as mysticism and philosophy. Or had been kept away from such pursuits by the priests and preachers.

Thus, while before, at the apex of our involvement with spiritual cults, we did “spiritual” visualization or meditated to get health, or send out peace to the world, we now mainly meditated to get to god, whatever that is.

Of course, to us, god as a “cosmic mind” was still a human-like thing who understood human needs and desires. It just no longer had a physical form, such as a shape of a Jesus or old father figure. Rather it had a spiritual form, meaning a form of mind only.

Still we were, for all intents and purposes, out of spiritual pursuits and back to old time religion. With the slight difference of trying to merge with god in meditation instead of trying to adore him, flatter him or ask him favors. But some church mystics also consider that that was what they really wanted too.

Without realizing what had happened to us, we had moved away from stuffy old religions taught to us by parents, rebelling against it, and gone after eccentric occultism, only to return once again to something like the god-believing religion of our childhood, the religion of our parents. We were now transformed into the “stuffy, square, uncool” adult that our own parents had once been.

After the rebellious and wild emotions of the youth subside, everyone enters into the level-headed, practical but also cold and accepting life of adulthood.

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In their youth they might have been hippies running away from city life out to communes and farms, or taking part in sit-ins, marches and demonstrations for peace or environmental awareness. They might have gone to anti-war rallies or congregated at rock concerts. But once they grow into adulthood they settle down, get married, raise a family, take on a home and mortgage and find a good job that allows them to support their new way of life. In short, they become the typical parent they once fought against and now have to endure their own parental battles with their own children.

In fact this is no different than what happens in most animals. In the beavers, for example, a young one day just plays a little too much, wanders away a little too far, and then ends up far from the parental home. Yet, once in a new area, it stops wandering when it finds a mater, settles down and raises a new family of beavers.

Of course this sort of behavior has great “survival” value for animals. If an animal stayed too close to parents then this might lead to inbreeding or what humans call incest. And this inbreeding might lead to the surfacing of genetic diseases that would lower the survival potential of the animals.

Staying too close to our roots, and inbreeding, basically undoes some of the survival benefits our cells have developed to protect us. The cells set up a system with 2 copies of our DNA, one from each parent, so that if one parent had a bad section of DNA (disease producing gene) the effects would be covered up by a good section from the other parent.

However that would all be useless if both parents came from the same population where everyone had bad DNA and produced a child with 2 bad DNA copies. The disease could not stay hidden (recessive) and the child would have a genetic disorder. The only way out of this problem is to modify behavior – have the animals move away to find alternate mates in a fresh area.

By wandering away and mating with someone from another area there is more chance of variety in the DNA and less chance of genetic diseases showing up. Thus it is quite useful to have instinctual behavior that causes animals to rebel or move away from where their parents live.

We could say that all the rebellion of youth against their parents has to happen for the good of the survival of our species. It is just unconscious instinct kicking in when we reach the teenager years. And that would then include our rebellion against the religion of our youth, and our wandering out in search of “truth” in other different religions. We were just being victimized by runaway instincts deep within us.

Naturally then, just as these instincts eventually wear down, and the animal settles into the life of a new adult (somewhere else) so we (if we had been aware at the time of the instinctual nature of our behavior) should have expected to find our interest in occult and spiritual ideas eventually wearing thin, and should have expected to find ourselves one day returning to something like the religion of adults – the religion of looking after children (telling them stories about how daddy-god and mommy-god looks after them and how they must obey king-god to ensure the efficient operation of the society they belong to).

But besides this new role of teacher to their children, adults also must be models of social stability for their children. They can't get excited and throw away jobs, newly created families, and house and mortgage just to plunge off on wild emotional trips in pursuit of strange ideas and occult powers. They need to look at things logically and practically. They instinctively become subdued, quiet and level-headed.

So, after drifting away from our youthful interest in occultism and spiritualism, our only remaining activities, of philosophical discussion (teaching others about our insights) and quiet meditation seemed to slide us in an imperceptible way into the adult



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model of behavior. It was as if we had come back to the less-emotional, quieter life of the down-to-earth adult – a life like that of our parents.

Yet our new religion of mysticism was not quite like the old religions of our childhood. We didn't have rituals anymore (neither Catholic church rituals nor occult rituals). We didn't have authoritarian priests anymore but loved to discuss, form opinions of our own and question. We didn't worship any king-god, father-god, or teacher or master, but were concerned with how we could be part of the substance of a supreme-mind-god. Our main activity was not the prayer of the churches, begging for health and wealth, nor the "visualization" of the occultists, begging spiritual forces for favors, but rather meditation.

Rather, we were meditating to reach mystical or transcendental union with this supreme mind.

Actually the switch over to the idea of god as a mind (a creative mind) was quite fitting for people like us who were interested in deep mystical philosophy. What better way was there to approach a supreme mind than to imitate it and engage in mental pursuits like reading philosophy, investigating reality and thinking about the purpose of the universe.

And, instead of the rousing bedtime stories of the adventures of human-like gods and spirits performing miracles, we now had to entertain ourselves with the dry philosophy of the mystics.

Of course since we were now engaged mostly in mental pursuits like reading it was only natural that god became for us a mental being.

This idea of god as a supreme mind was all that remained of those person-like gods in the myths and fairy tales of our childhood. Cosmic mind was all that was left of the person-like guardian spirits of the occult legends. All the body, personality, emotions, human-like behavior and earthly activity and history

had been stripped away from this god, leaving only a bare, naked cosmic mind staring down at us (telepathically of course).

Then one day we just gave up attending the discussions and lectures of all those occult and spiritual groups. We realized that we were only boring them with our interest in this mystical journey to union with divine mind. They preferred the excitement of a course in miracles. We had to go elsewhere for the sort of discussion that interested us now.

Luckily, during our time with the occultists we had often noticed that some of the concepts of the Western world mystics appeared to have been borrowed from the ancient Indian mystics, and especially from their writings called the Upanishads. And because of that, over the years, we had often gone off to meet visiting swamis from India whenever they held lectures in our area. And we lived in India for a couple of years, during which time we visited many so-called “holy” men of assorted faiths.

So when the time came for us to become adults and give up our rebellious interest in spiritualism we found it easy to slip over into Hindu mystical disciplines like the Vedanta and their philosophical, intellectual approach to god.

This decision to study Vedanta philosophy made the transition from teenage rebellion over to adult ways of thinking a little less traumatic. This is, because, instead of totally abandoning our rebellious ways and going back to some sort of Christian religion, similar to that of our parents, we could still feel “slightly” rebellious in this interest in “Eastern” as opposed to “Western” religions. We could feel confident that we had not turned into settled, unquestioning, apathetic adults but still possessed the guts of the “rebel” and “teenager” to keep away from the religion of our parents and chase Eastern religions like Vedanta instead.

Vedanta was actually a nice sort of philosophy for someone who needs to be a level-headed and practical adult but yet not be

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completely dominated by activities dealing with parent teaching child or parent caring for child. After all, adults sometimes have to engage in adults only activities – if only to keep intact their sense of identity as an adult.

Besides looking after children we adults must worry about our jobs, our mortgage, our friends – adults only activities. Activities which we sort out and work through with our minds, not with childish giggles. Often the adult has nobody to beg from. He has to solve his problems on his own – with his mind. In the animal world the adults use what mental skills they have to hunt and gather food while the babies stay home and wait for the food to arrive. Humans are just a little bit more intense in their use of their mind for survival. In fact we not only survived as a species but came to alter much of the world because of our mental powers. While most animals used the claws and fangs they were born with we used our minds to invent spears, knives, arrows, fires, crops, plows, wheels, chariots – all to increase our chances of surviving.

Adults, as compared to children and teenagers, use their minds much more – to survive the stresses of life.

Thus, in religion, it is fine to teach children through stories, myths and fairy tales or to conduct them as they sing songs of the heroes and gods (their kings and parents), but story telling and hymn chanting won't help an adult catch a deer for dinner or (in the modern world) sell an insurance policy or write a contract or create a computer app or press a piece of metal into the shape of an automobile.

Adults spend most of their waking day at their job and most of those jobs demand mental abilities.

So it is only fitting that religions for adults demand something more than only the features that are attractive to children (the enchanting story telling and invigorating sing-songs). Certainly

when adults get involved in training their children they also listen to those stories and participate in the singing, but when they interact as an adult with other adults they need something more intellectual – or they drift away from religion (as is seen in many Christian cults today). This is one reason why Eastern religions, with their deep philosophy, are often intellectually attractive to adults in the West.

That is not to say, of course, that Eastern religions don't also have their childish features. For example the Hindu religions of Krishna and Rama are very much like the Christian religion. In both cults there is a man-like god (in fact both Krishna and Rama are Kings) and a whole mythology that depicts their life and adventures. Plus, like the Greek, Roman, Hebrew and Christian gods, these Hindu gods show all the human emotions of man - anger, jealousy, rage - and all the human behaviors of man – war, eating, granting favors and making war. Just as the god of the Old Testament prompts Moses to make war so Krishna in the Bhagavad Geeta prompts Arjuna to go to war.

And, as with the Christians, the followers of Krishna and Rama sing songs of praise to these men-gods, and fall down in worship before them as one would fall down in front of an old-time King.

Even the most intellectual cults of the Hindus, like Vedanta, favor this worship of men-gods. Once we went to a Vedanta ashram (monastery school) in the Himalayas, to take some philosophy courses and found, in front of the ashram a giant statue to the monkey god, Hanuman. And, at another ashram along the banks of the Ganges river, when we tried to see some teaching swamis, we were told that nobody was available, since they had all been up late the night before celebrating the birthday of Rama, and so were now all exhausted and fast asleep. And swami Tapovanam, well-versed in high-brow Vedanta philosophy still loved

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to flop down and worship gods at the temples whenever, in his constant pilgrimages, he came into a new town.

It seems that even the most intellectual follower of Vedanta philosophy still can't shake themselves loose from the religious indoctrination of their youth. Indeed we have often seen Vedanta swamis smile as their followers worship them as gods- living gods.

Of course, by being outsiders in Hinduism (and told that nobody can be converted to Hinduism but must be born into it) it was easy for us to separate the pure philosophy from the myths, songs and king-god worship that seemed to prejudice the thinking of born-into-it Vedanta philosophers.

We were thus able to read the Vedanta texts, and assorted Hindu scriptures like the Upanishads or the Bhagavada Geeta, and separate the philosophy from the aspects that dealt with the usual king-god or parent-god worship. The part that was common to all religions.

Thus after a day at work we would go home and read Vedantic texts and contemplate great philosophical questions. Plus, besides that, we could talk with each other to discuss what we had learned or talk with each other about how we could apply Vedanta to our daily life. But, most of all, when in the quiet and peace of our home, after a hectic day, we would sit down and meditate.

Because our minds were still steeped in the brainwashing of our earlier childhood Christian heritage, and our years of exposure to spiritualist and occult propaganda, we thought of the meditation as if it were a mystical activity. We wanted to meditate to get into a mystical union with god, the mental god, the cosmic mind.

This constant meditation (for many hours every day) kept us relaxed. In that way the problems of life, the stresses of work and

and other adult worries, just didn't bother us too much. Sometimes we faced chaos. Sometimes we faced people who wanted to dominate us. But we were able to ignore most of it. We simply went home and relaxed in meditation and in reading.

But we weren't isolated, studying on our own, with our own interpretation of the Vedanta texts. We mostly read texts that included comments by present-day living swamis. And we had videotapes of hundreds of hours of talks given by various swamis and gurus on Vedanta. And, since this is the internet age, we could also watch the lectures of the swamis through podcasts over the internet.

Plus, sometimes we would go to see visiting Vedanta swamis who came to town. We would attend their local lectures (lasting a weekend, or a week) or their week-long retreats.

But, when we went to these public lectures, we often noticed that most of those practicing Vedanta were not like us. To the born-into-it Hindus in the crowd, Vedanta was just their childhood religion. They listened to the swamis and nodded in agreement in exactly the same way that a Christian would listen to a sermon in church- without critical analysis or questioning. And they sang songs the way Christians sang hymns.

Although they claimed that they practiced the adult-like, cool-headed, intellectual religion of Vedanta, they were really just grown up children who loved the old stories of the gods from their childhood. In fact, they even worshiped gods and their swamis the way others worship kings - they bowed down and kissed the feet of swamis or flopped out full-length onto the floor in front of them.

And some swamis also thought of themselves as authorities to be worshiped. They refused to answer questions. They hated discussion. They didn't like anyone who thought like a scientist.

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Since we were on a search for “truth” and trained to be objective and critical and not just accept ideas because some authority spoke them, it amazed us to see the swamis so authoritarian. It was as if they imagined they were gods, or at least kings, and everyone else was their servant.

In an old-time royal court only the King speaks and his subjects keep quiet and listen. Thus, at one lecture given by a visiting swami, someone asked a question about some aspect of the teaching, and was told by the swami to write it down, give it to someone at the back of the room after the meeting was over and then come to a special meeting – at the end of the week and early in the morning – where the swami would sift through the questions, decide which ones he liked (and the swami specifically said it would depend on who asked the question) and answer only those he thought worth answering. Those which were not too critical of his statements or of Vedanta philosophy.

Of course, the questioner just got up and walked out. Yet, a few minutes later, someone else asked a different question and, this time, the swami just ignored it.

We found this behavior by the swami amazing. We couldn't imagine going to, say a Chemistry or Biology lecture at a university, and finding the professor unwilling to answer questions. Though, of course, even at university we can always find a few professors, especially outside the science areas, who don't like questions. They think university is a place to show their superior position as head of the local animal hierarchy and not a place to train students to think for themselves. Or, perhaps some are afraid that their students will outshine them and, therefore, eventually replace them on the hierarchy.

However, the Vedanta swamis, unknown to them, did thrash out of us the one last vestige of childhood-like religion: mystical Meditation.

Meditation had been for us an emotional experience. During meditation we felt joy, happiness and quiet contentment. We felt worries and fears going away. We felt uplifted. Like a surge of excitement or energy was rising up through us. We felt enlightened. We imagined or felt like we had drifted upward to a higher state of mind.

But such emotion is not for the adult. The adult cannot break down into emotions in front of other adults or, worse yet, in front of the children. Adults would consider him weak and unable to face the duties of adulthood. Children would wonder if they could rely on him for their sustenance. The adult must not be overly emotional. He must think things through and tackle problems logically – or perish.

So one Vedanta swamis told us, “Meditate and suffer.” While some people loved child-like actives, such as worship and singing, and working themselves up into emotional states of ecstasy, the real practitioner of Vedanta were cold-hearted. They were an adult-like intellectual.

At one lecture a noted Vedanta scholar and swami, Chinmayananda, even said - “Vedanta is for the intellectually inclined. For those who have no tears to shed.” Those who were not intellectuals would likely prefer other practices like the emotional god worship or the physical Hatha yoga (twisting the body into different poses) and so on.

The swamis did do some meditation. But unlike other Hindu traditions, unlike Patanjali’s contemplative Yoga for example, which stressed meditation as union with god, they perhaps meditated only as a way to relax.

Or perhaps they felt that meditation was useful only as a way to slowly coerce those used to “religious” performance and meditation out from their overly emotional practices and into more intellectual activities.



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From what we had seen, overall, the Vedanta swamis believed mostly in reading and going to lectures. And of course they also believed in writing – especially writing commentaries on scriptures.

The idea seemed to be that, by reading, one day you would “realize” the truth. It would just push into your consciousness. It would be similar to what happens when we are sitting quietly thinking out a problem and then, suddenly, you have a moment of “a ha, now I see it.” So suddenly, one day while studying Vedanta you understand what the Vedanta texts are really telling you about the true nature of reality. It just comes to you in a flash. They call it “realization.”

Well we were already reading. And discussing. And had enjoyed many moments of insight, suddenly understanding things about the Vedanta philosophy. So it wouldn’t be that difficult to give up the child-like emotional parts, the meditation, and just read, reflect and think about Vedanta. Or write commentaries the way the swamis did.

One swami even told us to give our own public lectures – or write our own books – since we knew just as much about Vedanta as did those swamis giving the Vedanta lectures. We never did. Even though earlier, with the occultists and Rosicrucians, we had often given public lectures.

We were teachers by profession and so we knew how to speak in front of groups. But we didn’t think most people wanted to hear mystical philosophy. They preferred either traditional religion or occultism – where one begs for gifts from god or spirit or divine mind. So we just read and wrote and discussed since it made us happy. Yet it was useful to write things down, and to make our own books about mysticism.

As teachers we knew that often you learned a subject much more deeply when you taught others than when you just read about it yourself.

Certainly by teaching each other, and giving the other person the chance to teach us, we were able to realize things about the Vedanta, and how to apply it in the world, that helped us face our daily life much more easily.

Even without meditation, and without attending lectures, or sitting at the feet of swamis, we found that just reading and talking things out with each other brought us a lot of peace. We could go home at night and sit and read and talk. And it relaxed us. What more could we ask for?

In fact we almost became complacent in our knowledge, just as most adults become comfortable in their daily routine. They accept their position in life and they accept their born-into-it or rather indoctrinated-into-it religion. They are happy as they are and never question anything.

So we grew comfortably (blindly) into Vedanta, our adult intellectual activity. Like the followers of all religions we didn't bother to question our new religion, Vedanta, too much. We thought of it as containing a good explanation for the way the world seemed to be.

Yet we didn't follow just one swami's advice or the ideas and interpretations of Vedanta from just one line of teaching or school. We read the textbooks of almost every swami we could find. We read hundreds of books. One month Lise hid herself indoors alone and went through a few thousand pages of books we had gathered from the internet.

And we read critically, pausing and waiting for inspiration, and writing the thoughts that came to us. And we waited for the final great moment of inspiration, or self-realization.

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But, except for “increased understanding” of what the Vedanta texts meant, not much “cosmic realization” came to us. No great burst of energy. No sudden “aha, that’s how the universe really is.” And no, Western mysticism style even of “merging with god.”

In fact this idea of man, as a slave-servant, finding a way to merge into unity with god-king, or man, as human mind, finding a way to merge into unity with cosmic-mind is not really part of Hindu philosophy. The idea there is that there is no merging to be done. There is no transformation (alchemical operation) of one substance, man-mind, into another substance, cosmic-man-mind.

The doctrine of the Upanishads is that no merging or transformation can occur since man-mind is already cosmic-mind. You are already what you think you have to become. You just have to wake up, “smell the coffee,” open your psychic eyes, put on better glasses, or whatever, and “realize” that you are “already” cosmic mind.

The saying of the Upanishad scriptures is “Atman is Brahman,” meaning that human soul (Atman) is cosmic soul or god (Brahman). Or human-mind-spirit is cosmic mind.

And they are the same. So it is not a question of becoming something new or different, but only a question of becoming aware – becoming aware of the situation that already exists. This is called “realization,” since a word like “merging” or “enlightenment” doesn’t really convey the proper sense of what is supposed to happen.

This is why meditation is not such an important part of Vedanta (for some): realization can happen anywhere and at any time.

You can understand this by considering other times in your life when you just suddenly realized something. For example we knew a woman who had worked away from the home, as a

teacher, all of her life. She always ate out at restaurants and had never tried to make a meal for herself. Then one day after retiring, she decided to cook a recipe. She surprised herself. She told us she suddenly realized that she could cook, and that it was easy for her and that she was good at it. By comparison another friend tried auto mechanics and realized he was terrible at it. This is how realization works: by a sudden thought popping into your mind – as you do something.

The “doing” of something can include reading or writing or teaching. You can read a book about, say, how automobiles work, and suddenly come upon a chapter that intrigues you, and then exclaim, “a ha, now I see.” Or you could one day, according to the swamis of Vedanta, read some scripture book and exclaim, “now I get the universe.”

And realization can come while thinking. For example, during you pensive consideration of what you’ve read, mulling over the facts, suddenly your brain could “put 2 and 2 together,” as the saying goes. Or you might exclaim, as Archimedes did in his bathtub, “Eureka.”

Realization sometimes even comes before proof. Einstein didn’t experiment his way to the relativity theory. It just popped into his brain. It was pure scientific theorizing not scientific experimenting... maybe “thought experiments.” However many people couldn’t accept it, since it was just theory. They demanded proof which Einstein couldn’t provide. Only later scientific experimenters, proved Einstein’s theories.

Of course he was lucky. Many scientists have had similar realizations, only to find later on that the realization had been full of falsehoods and errors. Linus Pauling’s great realization, that vitamin C cured the common cold, proved to be a lot of nonsense.

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But beyond reading, thinking, musing or mentally experimenting, all common practices in Vedanta, the “doing something” that leads up to realization could also be meditating.

Yet, to say that you can realize that “you are god” or “Atman is Brahman” simply from reading or writing or teaching and not with meditating, is like saying you can only realize you are a good cook, not by cooking, but by sitting quietly, without thoughts intruding into your mind, and waiting for the idea “you’re a good cook” to pop into your head – as a gift from god. As divine grace of god, from above, descending magically into you.

Such ideas are really just another holdover from god-king religions. It is only the god-king who can bestow grace (favors, gifts) on you. It is only the god-father who can bestow food on you. So, likewise, it is only the Brahman who can bestow realization on you that you are he, that your mind is cosmic mind.

So even in meditation, or without it, our only duty, as a student of philosophy, was to sit and wait until the cosmic mind bestowed this realization on you. Do whatever you want. It is all irrelevant. You can’t force the cosmic to reveal itself to you. All you can do is wait. Or do anything. The idea was: Who can say how realizations come to us?

Yet, people realize they are, for example, good cooks when they try to cook. So why couldn’t one be able to “realize” Brahman by getting involved with the Atman-is-Brahman philosophy. Then, one day, while speaking about Vedanta or reading Vedanta or writing Vedanta there would be some sort of breakthrough and your mind would just wake up and you’d know you were much more than you once thought you were. You are a bigger, cosmic, universal mind.

In that sense, meditation was just “one more” way to engage your mind with the task of getting involved with Atman-is-Brah-

man philosophy. One more way to “do something” that might encourage the big breakthrough, the final realization that you are god.

Thus a few swamis, those who still believed in meditation, wrote about how meditation was a process where one tried to sit still physically, in a place of quiet, free of the chance of disturbance by someone or some event, and then “empty” the mind if you could. By having an empty mind, the theory goes, you are making yourself “available” for the realization, when it comes.

If your mind is busy with thoughts and feelings and emotions you won’t notice the god realization when it comes. Just as in a noisy party if you concentrate on some conversation you might not hear the doorbell sound.

So the key was to make the mind silent while you wait in anticipation for cosmic consciousness, or a sudden realization to pop into your head.

The vital part of this sort of meditation is then getting the mind under control.

The swamis advise us that one way to do that is to become a witness or a watcher. You try to just watch the mind the way you watch a parade, except that you will be watching a “thought parade” or a “feeling parade” or an “emotion parade.”

When you do this you just let all the thoughts and emotions swirl around you the way birds and insects and leaves swirl around you in the air if you go outside and sit in a park. You consider your thoughts and emotions the way you would consider all the external activities taking place around you. Consider your thoughts, emotions and feelings just as more “external” events around you.

After all, you can’t control the insects. You can’t control the leaves. You can’t control the weather. It is outside your power of

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control. You can do nothing about rain and thunder – just watch them. Observe them.

Likewise most of your thoughts and feelings come from the subconscious mind. You don't know where they come from and when they come, anymore than you know where a bird came from before it landed on your window sill. In fact 90% of our mind is below the conscious level. The subconscious mind controls our heartbeat. It controls our respiration. It controls the release of chemicals (like hormones) into our body. And it does that all without our conscious knowledge of what it is doing.

And just as we have little control over when our blood sugar level rises so likewise we have little control over when a feeling might pop into our awareness.

If you can't control when thoughts and feelings come then you might as well consider them the way you consider other things in the world around you, like the wind and the rain and the birds and the insects. They are all mostly beyond your control.

It would be quite useless to try and control when a bird comes to you and it would be quite useless and ineffective to try and control when thoughts come to you.

The only real solution is to treat thoughts, emotions and feelings the way you treat birds, insects, rain and wind: as something external to you and beyond your control. You probably wouldn't get upset with a drop of rain or a bird in a tree near you and so there is also no point in getting upset about a thought in your head.

All you can do is watch them. Watch as you would watch any other external event. Without getting involved in it. Without getting upset about it.

Soon you start to consider all those thoughts and feelings as like all the birds and insects and rain and wind around you. It all seems “external” events and “beyond your control.”

As some swamis put it, as you watch (without getting involved) the parade of events around you, you begin to classify them as “external” to you. Look at them and say “this is not me.” My self is the watcher, the witness of this. These feelings, emotions and thoughts are not me. These are externals to be. What am I? Look at the thoughts and say “not this, this is not me.” Look at the feelings and emotions (fear, anger, depression and so on) and say “not this, this is not me, this is something external.”

Vedanta swamis often tell us the most important task during meditation is to discriminate. That means you look at the thoughts and feelings and discriminate or separate them from you, the witness, the watcher. As you watch the most important thought you should have, if you allow any, is to think, “not this, not this, not this.” None of these are mine. They all come from someplace “external to me.”

Realize that none of those thoughts and feelings are you. So all you can do is just watch them. The way you would watch a monkey at the zoo climbing around in the trees. Bad thoughts? Mischief making monkeys. Amusing. Not irritating. Fun to watch and laugh at. Nothing to do with you. Bad emotions? Depression? Funny antics by monkeys chasing each other through the trees. Hilarious. Not something that should bother you.

But you are not “tricking” yourself in pretending that those thoughts and feelings are external things to the real you, the witness. In reality, thoughts and emotions are created externally to you.

But to understand that, you have to examine what an emotion really is. The feelings and emotions (and thoughts) are chemical events. And chemical events produce real effects in you. For ex-



ample if you drop acid on your skin it burns the skin. If radiation from an atomic blast hits the skin it burns the skin. If radiation from the sun hits the retina of the eye then it burns the retina. But instead of calling these things by the name “burnings” we call them sensations. A sensation of pain or a sensation of sight.

The chemical events at the location of the chemical burn, to the skin or eye retina, then produce further chemical events in nerves. The chemicals calcium, potassium and sodium are especially involved in the chemical events cascading down a nerve cell. Then special chemicals get released from the ends of the nerves, called neurotransmitters. So they “burn” the ends of other nerves in the brain. The brain is just a huge collection or set of nerves, chemically active nerves. When a “burning” nerve fires up to the brain it touches off similar chemical activity in every nerve it reaches. Soon the brain is on fire with whole sections of the brain alive with chemical activity.

We can’t sense events in our brains in the way we sense pain and sight but chemical reactions are going on in the brain. Our body knows something is happening to it, and in it. Something is churning in us. The body detects (but not as a normal sense) that something is happening. We give the names “feelings” and “emotions” to the chemical fires that our brains detect as happening inside the brain.

We even attach words related to the normal sensations to some of the chemical events, or feelings, in our brain. For example we say love gives us a “warm” feeling. Or we get a “cold” fright.

But then we get so used to having special “feelings” whenever chemical activity of some sort is taking place in the brain that we imagine that we are not just aware of chemicals churning in us in special ways, but that something non-physical is occurring.

We then try to turn that into some “spiritual” thing that is somehow different from other “physical” activities in the body.

Ancient philosophers like Plato even imagined that there is a separate “world” of ideals, that is a world of mental concepts, where those chemical activities called anger, fear, depression and so on exist, and that this world of the mind was separate from the world of the other physical or chemical events like rusting, methylation or boiling.

Yet, in reality all those feelings and emotions (and thoughts) in you are just chemical events no different than that of other chemical events taking place in the external world, like fire burning wood or oxygen rusting iron.

So, ultimately, all those feelings and emotions that disturb us are no different than other external activity such as burning and rusting and boiling and acid eating at you. They are no different in the way they get produced. Depression in your mind, for example, is quite like a raging fire in a forest. Different names. Yet both fire and depression are chemical events external to you, the witness, the watcher, the consciousness.

So why get hung up about thoughts, emotions and feelings? Truly they are no different than other external chemical activity.

In meditation just consider thoughts and feelings the way you would consider a pot of water boiling on the stove in your kitchen. It is not you, the watcher. So let it boil. Let depression, anger, jealousy just boil away in you. It is no more the real “you” than is the boiling water. All you have to do is watch it.

Plus we have other ways to convince ourselves that we should disregard all the emotions in us. Normally our subconscious mind seems to be able to handle the heart by itself. It doesn’t ask our advice about the heart rate or blood pressure. So why does it want now to bring to our attention feelings about fear, anxiety, depression or anger?

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There is absolutely nothing sacred about these emotions that warrants our “having” to pay attention to them.

Nor is there any thing about these emotions that should make us want to “fight them off.” Emotions like anger, greed, jealousy and so on are not evil things. Nor are they wicked vices. Nor are they in us as useless appendages. Like most of our body structure and physiological processes they evolved for a purpose. Usually they developed because they gave us some sort of survival value.

Fear for example has survival value. If you see a tiger then your body has to get ready to either run or fight. Chemicals and hormones diffuse out into your body. The heart, lungs and muscles get ready for action. The brain gets ready. And you feel this chemical event going on in you and call the whole feeling, the whole event, by the name “fear.”

Usually the conscious mind has very little control over the process. We can’t use the higher mind to “think it over” or weigh pros and cons about the tiger. So the subconscious mind runs the show. It gets you ready quickly.

As far as the conscious “you” is concerned the whole “fear” phenomena is out of your control. It is as much out of your control as is the fact of a lightning storm suddenly appearing near you. All you can do is watch the lightning. And, likewise, all you can do is watch the fear (and run or fight).

The only problem is when the subconscious mind throws fear at you for no reason. The conscious mind accepts it and decides that there is nothing around to be afraid of. So it dismisses the fear, or tries to suppress it. But the subconscious mind still produces the fear.

All you can do then is say to your subconscious. “Fine. You let me know. I feel the fear. But I’ve determined that there is nothing to worry about. So I don’t want to hear anything further about

this. You brought it to me, so now you handle it. Take care of it the way you run the heart without my input. Do the same now.”

Then, if the subconscious mind still insists on producing fear, all you can do is realize it is out of your control just as a lightning storm or rainstorm is out of your control, There is nothing for you to do then except become a watcher of the fear, just as you would watch a rainstorm or lightning storm.

Don't fight the subconscious. It is only doing its job. It is running on instincts in producing fear. Doing what it thinks is best for your survival. You might disagree about the need for fear but try to understand the animal nature of the subconscious mind. Don't try to dissuade it since it is backed up by millions of years of evolutionary force – and the impulse of life to survive. To fight it down is worse than raging at a storm. Just sit quietly and enjoy the fear until it goes away – as it eventually will.

And the same applies to something like anger. It is also not an evil thing. Not the work of the devil. Not an immoral vice. Your subconscious mind developed the emotion of anger because it had survival value.

If competitors came into your territory or threatened to make off with your food supply, then you (the ancient animal) had to do something about it, or die. Your survival depended on how you reacted to this.

So your heart, lungs, and muscles got ready to face the competitor. Your mind worked you up into a lather – made you courageous by sending out chemicals, hormones and nerve impulses to the body. All over you things were happening. You felt this and the overall feeling you called “anger.”

But, in our modern world, most of the time our survival is not really threatened. Still we feel threatened when others push us to do things we don't want to do or prevent us from doing what we want, the way animals were threatened when other competitors

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pushed them around. They just wanted to sit quietly, peacefully and eat bananas all day and now someone is stopping them. Forcing them to give up their docile life and become aggressive. To feel angry.

So it is useless to fight against anger. You can't fight against an emotion that developed millions of years ago. You can't convince the subconscious mind to give up its concern about survival. If it did then it might also give up other impulses for survival – like keeping your heart going.

So, as with fear, you can only acknowledge the anger. Congratulate the subconscious mind for letting you know there is something to be angry about. Thanking it for being so good at these survival instincts. And then, looking around and decide if there is really anything to be angry about.

Use the conscious mind to decide if getting angry will help you face the situation. Or would it help you resolve difficulties with others. If you find there is no use in continuing the angry feeling then say you “release” it to the subconscious mind.

Let the subconscious mind handle the anger the way it handles the heart rate and the breathing and the release of hormones. Then sit back and become a witness, a watcher.

If the anger continues then it is as much out of your control as is the temperature outside. You have nothing to do with how the temperature was set. You have nothing to do with the anger. So all you can do is watch it. Don't fight it or you fight your own subconscious mind as if you could convince it to give up trying to protect you. So thank it and just enjoy the show.

Always remember that emotions like anger and fear and depression are brought out by the subconscious mind because of it's instincts- instincts that originated millions of years ago. Originally the subconscious mind triggered these responses because of serious survival concerns.

Unfortunately, the subconscious mind, always ready to protect us, is still bogged down with its ancient behavior patterns. It is bogged down with the necessity of stimulating emotions (emotion contains the word motion, and gets us ready for motion or action). As a result it often elicits these emotions when, in our modern world, they should not really be applied. So often the feelings and emotions are very out of place. For example we get angry at our neighbor breaking our hammer instead of at an enemy breaking branches on your banana tree.

This is why it is best to acknowledge the subconscious for its good work, tell it you don't agree but will keep a watch out just in case it was right. And then do just that: become a watcher.

Of course, such ideas are useful in meditation as a way to deal with emotions but they are even more useful during the activities of your day. It would be quite useless to "overcome" fear and anger during meditation but then, after meditation is over, go outside and get angry at someone for stepping on your grassy lawn.

In fact most of the techniques for meditation have even greater application as ways to deal with day to day life.

Thus, for example, depression is a natural instinct to suppress animals lower in the hierarchy and chemically drive them into submission. It is a natural way to get animals to do nothing and stay with the mass of loyal followers of the herd (be a sheep). Because they do little to oppose the leaders at the top of the heap those alpha animals don't have so many battles with obviously weaker animals. They only have to deal with the very few strong rebels or challengers who are capable of testing the leader's claim to be the "fittest" or those who should survive.

But it makes no sense to be depressed about the neighbor or the coworker at the office. Especially if they are only an equal to you and not above you on the social hierarchy. No use getting depressed because they have a new car and you don't. No use get-

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ting depressed because they have more money in the bank. No use getting depressed because they got a promotion and you didn't.

Certainly cars, boats, new homes, more money, promotions and even expensive clothes are all status symbols. They show your place in the social hierarchy. But we have to decide if the person flashing these symbols at us is only "trying to rise up the hierarchy" or pretending he is higher than he really is – showing off. What really counts is the status symbols of those who are truly above us in the hierarchy, not the wanna-be pretend symbols of our equals.

So if our subconscious mind continues to plague us with depression about no money, no job, no friends, or whatever we can do nothing about it. The subconscious is only doing its job. We just have to forget about fighting the subconscious. You can't beat down a million year old instinct. You can't ignore an instinct based in survival of the species. Anything that is alive wants to go on living. That is, all life wants to survive. It is useless to fight the instinct to live. Or the instinct to continue the species, which is what the depression instinct is based on. So just become a watcher, a witness. Enjoy the show.

Remember to always just say to our subconscious mind, "you can handle the breathing without my interference, so why are you bringing this fear or depression or anger to my attention now? Hey subconscious animal mind, just handle it yourself. The way you handle the breathing by yourself, the way you handle the heart rate by yourself, the way you handle thyroid hormone secretion by yourself... so handle this depression by yourself. Don't involve me."

You don't control where and when the heart beat comes from. You don't control where or when or why a feeling like depression came. So let the subconscious mind handle it all. It was content to handle it by itself before. So let it continue to handle it now.

As far as you are concerned the feeling like depression was not started by you, and cannot be ended by you and is outside your control or ability to modify. So consider it the way you consider anything else outside your control (heart beat, weather around you, birds outside your house). Let other forces (climate or the subconscious) control it. All you can do is watch.

Don't get involved. Just watch. Surprisingly often we find the feelings go away by themselves. It is as if the subconscious mind says, "OK. Fine. He doesn't want to deal with it. He wants me to take care of it. So I will. Bye for now. See you next time."

If we "meditate" in this way soon we realize that all the feelings, emotions and thoughts are external things. Outside what seems to be your "awareness."

Then you notice that there is only a sense of "I" or "me" that you would consider as the real you, the so-called Atman. All the rest is external.

OK. So in Vedantic meditation, after making everything else a big parade of externals (even if conventionally people think of things like thoughts and feelings as internals), you recognize the real "self" the "soul" the "Atman." But then what?

After years of doing this sort of meditation (and developing a good method for shutting up and shutting down bad thoughts and feelings) all we ever got was the "realization" that we seem to be a "self. Nothing more. Well maybe some happiness – the happiness of feeling your mind is under control and not harassing you any more.

But if the goal of this meditation was to find the "Atman" or the real self then maybe it succeeded. We did think of our self as this awareness surrounded by external thoughts.

Yet most people who go along in a normal life also consider themselves as a "self" performing all the activities of life, like



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eating, reading, sleeping and so on. Surely we didn't have to do meditation to realize that?

Sure, it's a good way to face all the anxieties and worries and negative emotions in life, but is there more to it than that? What about this part of realizing that Atman is Brahman? Of realizing that your soul or self or mind is cosmic mind? That you are god?

For us, at least, there was never any experience beyond that of finding your self, ego or "identity" as an awareness or consciousness surrounded by external thoughts and feelings.

That is, we never felt, as theorized by the Upanishads, that we had achieved any connection with divine mind. We never had any realization, "I'm god" or "I'm cosmic mind" or "I'm Brahman." It just never came.

In fact, there doesn't seem to be any reason why this "real you" or awareness at the heart of your meditation should be, somehow, the cosmic mind, the universal consciousness, the ground of everything, or ultimate reality. Did it even make sense to speak of such a thing as cosmic mind?

Are there any comparable examples around us that demonstrate that some local thing, like your mind, is part of some universal thing, like cosmic mind?

To answer that question let's first look at an example that is not so abstract. Something more common to the everyday world. Say, for example, that you have an ice cream factory. If we want to be "theoretical" or "abstract" we could say a system that runs a process of making ice cream.

Then, let's suppose that one day someone comes to you and says, "your ice cream factory" is the "cosmic ice cream factory." Your first reaction should be to stop and ask, "what do you mean?" Is there such a thing as a cosmic ice cream factory? Does

it exist? Does it have any meaning? Is it something that is only imagined?

Probably the person can't answer those questions so he modifies his statement for you. Now he claims, "your ice cream factory is connected with all ice cream factories, everywhere in the universe." But does that make it more understandable? How is your ice cream factory connected with any other? Does he mean by telephone, or internet? Can he explain, or demonstrate, what this connection might be? Does his statement mean anything at all? That is, does it contain anything that you can check up on. If he says "connected, because of telephones" then you can check that and verify if such a connection exists or not. But if he can't specify something you can check you would have to conclude that he is speaking meaningless gibberish.

So, now let's get back to the statement of the Upanishads, that your soul is cosmic soul or your mind is cosmic mind.

To understand what this means, or even if it has any meaning, we will have to be more specific about our terms. First of all, we could, taking the ice cream factory illustration as a starting point, consider our mind as a type of factory, a place that manufactures thoughts and feelings.

Then we can advance to the idea of a cosmic mind, a giant, universal factory filling all of space and time and making thoughts and emotions. Well first off we can ask if anyone has seen such a thing. Obviously not. Nobody has witnessed it working away, churning out thoughts. And, of course, we now have the difficulty: how could you tell the difference between a thought churned up in your own factory (mind) and a thought churned out in the cosmic factory (mind)? If you can't even decide how to tell the difference between the two, then you certainly won't have a way to measure which is which. And that means you won't have a way to verify whether or not there is any cosmic mind. So there is no way that "anyone" ever could have

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gotten proof of such an idea. They could have only got the idea through imagination.

But a mystic could still modify this and claim, as with the ice cream factory illustration, that our mind is connect with the minds of all others. Well, certainly it is. The connection is called communication. But other than that we have to ask what is meant by connected. Is it a physical connection? Then nobody has seen anything physical connecting minds.

If it is some other sort of connection then can it be described? And how would you know if you have this connection with another mind? The only way, if the mind is a thought factory, is if you could tell the difference between thoughts created in your mind and thoughts created in other minds? And how can you do that? Perhaps if you had a thought related to something only they had ever sensed? But there are no recorded examples of such events being tested. Nobody has ever asked, “nice thought, let’s go to Bob and see if Bob was thinking about that because he saw such and such in front of him.” So there is no evidence of such connections between minds. It could only have been imagined.

An idea related to that of “connections” between minds is that of all minds being part of a super mind. But how is such a thing possible? Are there any other examples around us things that belong to super groups? Of course. Everything.

A bunch of sheets of metal are connected together by welding to become part of a larger thing, a car body. And a bunch of car body parts and motors and upholstery, and other stuff, is connected together to form a car. Just as a bunch of transistors are connected together to be part of a larger thing, a computer. The world seems to be made of sets, or collections.

Of course we keep the two ideas separated: a particular member of a set is not the same thing as the whole, complete set. A bolt is not a car motor, which is a collection of bolts and other

parts. Plus the function of bolt and motor are different. Plus we have a rule that describes how elements of the set, like bolts, get connected or brought together to make the, larger, set, like a motor. That rule describes processes like screwing, riveting and welding in.

So we could start by having as elements a lot of individual minds. Forgetting for the moment that those minds are themselves sets or collections of other parts, like neurons and glial cells, which are themselves in turn collections of chemicals. In fact we could almost go on forever, claiming nerve cells are made of molecules like proteins, which are collections of atoms, which are collections of protons, which are collections of quarks, and so on.

But let's say we go upward and decide to make a set or collection of individual minds? According to what we know about sets we have to ask: what is the rule for collecting them together (like the welding rule for collecting bolts together)? What is the function of the new cosmic mind, as opposed to the function of the individual minds of this new set? How can we tell the two apart? How can we know which is cosmic mind and which is human mind? If we have 2 terms, human mind and cosmic mind then there must be some way to describe the difference. What is it? What is it that makes the larger collection? Are there other things in the cosmic mind set besides the individual human minds, just as there are other things besides bolts in the collection called a motor? And has anyone ever seen this collection?

The whole set of cosmic mind seems extremely complex to try and define. There are so many problems to try and sort out, to try and explain. It looks difficult to adequately define what such a thing might be. Yet people tell us it must be. Or that they know there is a cosmic mind. How can they know that if we can't even explain what we mean by cosmic mind? Again it looks like the whole thing is just an imagined idea.

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And how could meditation help you realize such a vaguely defined item as cosmic mind? We can realize that we are a good cook, after trying or experimenting, since we know what we mean by a good cook. We can realize that we are a good automobile mechanic, after trying, because we know what we mean by mechanic. We can realize that we belong to Canadian society, after thinking about it, because we can look up the definition of what it means to be a Canadian.

But how can you realize you are part of a divine mind if you don't even, can't even, properly define what such a thing might be. How can you be sure you have "contacted" or realized you are part of cosmic mind if you don't have any checklist of features or properties to use to verify that you have in fact achieved what you set out to achieve.

I can say I have realized I am a cook by looking at a checklist that includes things like "can use an oven" or "can blend spices" but what can I use to be able to say "I am cosmic mind."

If you can't describe how you might be able to "know" you are cosmic mind (what the checklist of features are) then you can't know if you have "realized" it or not. So you can't claim to have proof of such realization. That means it is a meaningless concept.

So, eventually, after thinking it through, we had the "realization" that the swamis were probably right about meditation not being worthwhile for realizing that "Atman is Brahman" or that your mind is cosmic mind. (Though it might be useful for getting your own mind out of the tempest of negative feelings and thoughts).

Thus we decided to stop looking at this "type" of meditation, (the resting in the center of the self surrounded by a thought parade), as useful for one day "realizing" anything about higher reality or the deeper meaning of the universe. In fact we started to

wonder if such a goal was just a mirage and if our search for ultimate meaning in the cosmos was just a fool's errand.

That meant that all we had left from Vedanta was a method of meditation to calm the mental and emotional storms in us and produce some happiness. Plus, of course, our studies and readings. But what use was there in reading philosophy that was founded on meaningless concepts like your soul is cosmic soul?

Then, to top it off, we started to notice that even the swamis often didn't really "teach" the contents of the Upanishads as they were written. Instead, quite often their "commentaries" on ancient scriptures were not commentaries at all – just an excuse for discussion of their own views. They used the scriptures as a point of departure into their own musings about the text. It was a way to generate new ideas – ideas that often had little to do with what was written in the old texts.

This seemed to be little different than what we had experienced in Christianity. Many modern television evangelists in the West pick and choose their scripture quotations carefully. And then discuss on TV ideas that have little support in ancient texts – unless taken out of context – and unless other parts of scripture, which express different, or contradictory ideas to that in their quote, are ignored.

Of course that didn't mean that they wouldn't bring up those contradictory ideas in another later lecture. Which is why, on one day, the televangelists can turn a philosophy of poverty into one of making money, and then, on the very next broadcast, speak about being meek – giving scriptural quotes on both days to support both ideas (but never doing it at the same time).

Yet, as we said earlier, a good way to grasp any philosophy, or actually any subject, more completely is to try and teach it to others. So, in a way these commentaries by swamis, and evangelists, are just the teacher teaching himself.

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However, we have to remember that, as Bertrand Russell, once reminded us, “familiarity breeds contempt” and he had the best example of that. After years of familiarity with mathematics, writing thousand page treatises on its principles, he developed a great contempt for the subject.

Unlike many other students of Vedanta we really became overly familiar with its tenets and doctrines. We delved deeper into the subject than most other born-into-it Vedanta scholars, as we had before delved deep into Christian philosophy. And the ultimate result was to confirm Russell’s claim: it slowly bred in us contempt for the subject and for those who never analyzed its dogmas but just blindly taught them to others.

In fact we wondered why most students of Vedanta didn’t use their mental abilities to critically examine and investigate and analyze the philosophy. After all, one of the most important textbooks in Vedanta, written by Adi Sankara, bears the title: “Crown Jewel of Discrimination.”

Mental discrimination, including the analysis of consistency of a theory and whether it contains contradictions, and an analysis to determine if a theory is testable or even if it is meaningful or meaningless, and then analysis of supposedly supporting facts (in a way that reminds us of Western science) and sorting out of our experience for examples to support a theory are some of the most important tools we humans have at our disposal when searching for the meaning of life. Yet this “Crown Jewel of Discrimination” does not advocate objective research. It only refers to the discrimination used during meditation – discriminating between the self and the other things: sensations, thoughts and emotions.

Nobody seems to have ever questioned whether they should even try to test the theory of Vedanta, that Atman is Brahman.

In fact, Swami Chinmayananda once told us of a scholar who came to him and his own master, Swami Tapovan, seeking help.

This fellow wanted to know if either of these revered swamis could give him hard evidence or soft evidence, anything at all, to help confirm to him the truth behind the ancient teachings of Vedanta. Neither swami could bring up even a single incident in their life, no any first hand experiences, to confirm the Vedanta teachings. To them it was all just dry, intellectual activity and a patient waiting for realization to come.

They could provide no evidence to help out the scholar in his search. But the fellow desperately wanted “experience” that could confirm at least the idea of an afterlife or next (reincarnated) life. He wanted evidence not just intellectual talk and discussion with swamis.

But the swamis could only advise him to be patient. So, distraught, feeling hopeless, entertaining the idea that even venerable swamis hadn’t had spiritual experiences, he concluded that the only way to find out for sure would be to die. Thus he threw himself over a bridge.

Of course the two venerables didn’t shed a tear about it. They didn’t get emotional. Nor did they feel guilty about being unable to help the man. They just said, “one less fool in the world.”

The fellow was a fool to them since he wanted evidence. He was not willing to sit patiently and wait for realization.

That went against a cardinal rule of the orient. Nobody pokes and prods the king. People just wait for the king to act first. The wait for the king to grant his grace, his favors, in his own sweet time.

To ask for evidence of the Vedanta theories and ask for it now is to upset the whole social structure, the whole animal dominance hierarchy. It is to presumptuously and arrogantly ask the god-king to get the lead out, get a move on and reveal himself now, rather than waiting meekly by, hoping for the king-god, cos-



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mic or not, to perform his “realization” miracle whenever it pleases his majesty, his lordship.

All over the orient the masters, swamis, and gurus likewise expect you to sit and wait for them. They don’t like it, consider it arrogant of you, if you don’t want to wait. They have stories to put you down. They have methods to knock the supposed “arrogance” out of you. Including having you work as a personal slave to them, until you realized how arrogant you are. And who are you to be so arrogant? To dare to ask questions? To dare to ask for evidence? To be so bold and not wait patiently on them. Only the king is supposed to be that arrogant.

Thus oriental masters pretend to themselves that us Westerners are arrogant. And impatient. Even though they have no justification for these theories of theirs that we are bold and irreverent (not acknowledging the hierarchies). So they protect their status on top of the “knowledge” totem pole in the same way that they protect their unverified theories: accusing those who want evidence of arrogance, or daring to question the king.

Unlike Western science, there is no objective investigation or research in Vedanta. Just an injunction to be patient, and wait. But modern people, like the fellow who killed himself, don’t want to wait for natural forces to show themselves. They don’t want to wait for god’s proof. Proof either is there or it isn’t.

Scientists in the modern world go out and shake nature with all their strength and demand that nature reveal its secrets by experiments. They actively play with nature and manipulate its forces. And they get the results they ask for, proof or disproof of theories and ways to apply theories to make inventions, which also prove the theories that the inventions are based on.

By comparison Vedanta just sits passively by, like a timid, meek servant and waits for god to reveal itself, when it pleases god. When god’s whimsical nature lets it show itself.

To someone with a scientific mind this idea of just waiting for “proof” is a cope-out. A way to defend a theory by claiming there might be proof, or there will be proof, but just not now. It will come only later, in some unknown way, of its’ own accord, at some unknown time, from some unknown place.

Imagine saying that we must wait to see if a flame applied to hydrogen gas will really cause an explosion. Wait until some unknown time in the future when some unknown force might, or maybe might not, cause the gas to explode. Nobody would care about your theory they want practical and useful knowledge that they can use and apply now.

If that idea of a proof only as something to be “hoped for” in the future is the only support for a theory then the theory has no support. Hope of a proof is not a proof.

When we first got interested in Vedanta we thought that meditation was the practical or experimental side to the theoretical side of the Vedanta philosophy. We imagined that meditation was the complement to theory, the way that, in science, lab experiments for our students complement the textbook theory. We thought meditation was a way to prove Vedanta theory in the same way that chemistry students go into the lab and prove for themselves the theories of chemistry.

So we imagined that our meditation was the “experimental” side to Vedanta, the practical way to test and prove the theory of Vedanta about Atman-is-Brahman, your mind is cosmic mind.

But then we realized, “realized,” that this is not a good analogy at all. Meditation is a wait and see experience, not a manipulative experiment.

In chemical experiments in the lab, if done properly, you either prove or disprove the theories of the books. You don’t have to wait and see if the experiment might produce results at some time in the distant future, when the forces of cosmic chemistry

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are willing to let you in on their secrets. But with meditation you can only set yourself up for the long waiting game, hoping god will favor you one day.

Nor is there any reason why the style of meditation, as explained earlier, should coax cosmic mind out into the open. In fact, it is hard to get any result when the goal is not even clearly defined, when cosmic mind is not clearly defined.

Thus, looking back at it now, we should not have been surprised to find that our meditations never drove us to any realization of our mind as cosmic mind. God just didn't find our pesky inquisitive nature to his liking.

Just as our earlier search among the spiritualists and occultists proved to us that it was all hogwash, so we were almost convinced that Vedanta was a lot of creative thinking by imaginative priests. (However Johnson in his history of meditation, called *Riding the Ox Home*, maintains that the ancient mystics of India used to drink hallucinogenic substances before composing their hymns).

But we were relieved to find that we weren't the only ones the cosmic mind frowned upon. One day one of the swamis remarked that, after 60 years of reading, writing, lecturing, teaching, meditating and praying, he was still not realized. He was not a living "realized soul."

Of course his followers didn't believe him. People just thought he had to be realized. After all he was a swami. Many even called him a saint. Or a living god, meaning a human with advanced knowledge. A few bowed to him, kissed his feet or even flopped around on the floor in front of him like a fish out of water.

Yet, this truthful swami, unlike most others we knew, didn't like people to worship him as a god. He usually waved them away. And he laughed at people who said weird things to him like, "just let me touch you swami and I'll be healed."

He knew that he had never experienced anything “spiritual” to justify such beliefs in his godhood or healing powers— so could not stand adoration from his followers.

For sure, he had learned a lot about Vedanta. He knew the theories by heart and could make them obvious to almost anyone. But, although having many small moments of increased understanding of what Vedanta was all about, he had never had any grand realization of the “big truth behind the universe.” No unveiling. No parting of the illusion to reveal reality.

Still, this intellectual pursuit of knowledge is similar to what many scholars do in the west. They also pursue knowledge for its own sake.

But scientists, unlike the average scholar in the West, like to go beyond just acquiring knowledge or trying to understand other-people’s theories. And Vedanta is someone’s theory. Scientists also like to play with the theories. They like to verify and test their theories to see if they are useful and if they can be applied to invent something useful for society.

Thus while spiritualists might use their minds to “visualize” guardian spirits going out to heal someone or “visualize” vibrations of healing energy flowing toward a sick person, so scientists also use their minds to visualize things. But what they visualize is ways to test theories, ways to do experiments. And then, after physically working their discovery into a physical device, visualize ways to send out, not spirits or vibrations, but physical doctors and nurses to physically heal someone.

So both spiritualist and scientist use their mind – but in a different way. And both might use their mind power to try and heal someone – but in a different way. And in a sense, since spiritualists also tried to experiment and tried to change the earth and the life on it, they were almost scientists. Semi-scientists.

But the Vedanta scholars were like neither of them. They disdained the spiritualists love for applications - even if it was by supposed spiritual means. And they disliked the scientists love for exploration and investigation. Overall the Vedanta swamis detested questions. Hated discussions. Didn't like to criticize others, or be criticized by people or even question what previous authors wrote. They believed that if someone once wrote a scripture then future scholars had to accept every word of it as true. They thought their theory was the final and the ultimate truth, unlike scientists who have learned that today's widely accepted theory may be in the trashcan tomorrow.

In that sense we finally realized that the Hindu Vedanta was actually more like Christian theology, while spiritualism was actually more like science - in the sense that they were open to new ideas. In going from spiritualism to Vedanta it had almost been a move backwards toward the same sort of dogmatic and anti-scientific religion we had left behind in our childhood Christianity.

Devotees of the religions usually don't use or accept scientific method - the method of trying to be unbiased in your observations of nature, and willing to put all theories to the test, or discard, or at least hold off from believing in theories that can't be tested. And much more; see our book *How to Be a Scientist* for more details of what science really is.

However, we've found that most religious devotees don't even know what science is. They think of it as just engineering or technology. Or, worse yet, as a collection of dogmatic information - and so on a par with the dogmatic religious theories. They think of the textbooks of science the way they think of the scriptures of their religion, as a book that claims to have truth, unwavering, dogmatic, fixed and unchanging truth. For them the contents of science textbooks is just a competing collection of eternal, inflexible theories like those of their religion. That is why they feel that science is somehow in competition with religion.

And, by viewing science as some sort of set of dogmatic doctrines they can't understand why science constantly changes its theories. They think of it as a fault. How can a dogmatic, fixed theory suddenly be wrong, they wonder, it must mean that science is a bad theory. While their dogmatic religion hasn't changed in 2000 years so it must be more right. The bad logic here is the assumption that science is dogmatism.

While we had been with the spiritual and occult groups we had learned to be open-minded and willing to explore all theories. It had made us appreciate science. So it was easy for us to, eventually, wake up to the fact that Vedanta was not scientific. It was fixed theory. Dogmatic, unchangeable theory. Set in stone for all time as if it were ultimate truth.

In the "adult" part of our life's journey we had only come back, with Vedanta, to something like our earlier dogmatic Christianity. Except that, when we first started into Vedanta, we had found it more logical, more reasonable, more intellectual, more adult-like than the childish myths and stories of our Catholic heritage. Yet we should have realized that something was amiss when, after the death of Swami Chinmayananda, his swami disciples preferred to sing hymns at meetings to giving lectures and when they announced that, in addition to giving training red toward producing new swamis, they would henceforth train people to become priests.

Of course we could have stayed with this adult church. But we couldn't. We had developed too great an appreciation for the value of science and exploration.

But, yet, we don't condemn churches like in Christianity and Vedanta. In fact we applaud their efforts to figure out the world. It is the best that early man could do. But today we have better tools and better methods for trying to figure out the universe. We should joyfully use them and not remain stuck in ancient theories.

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Especially, we shouldn't stay with religions that contain so much thinly disguised animal behavior, so much behavior related to obeying authorities, those at the top of the animal hierarchy, the dominant individuals who think only of competition.

When we get older we especially grow tired of all this constant effort of those at the top of the hierarchies to keep others down: don't question, obey, believe what we tell you because we tell you, be meek, mild, humble, be patient and wait until the god-king sends his grace, his "realization" to you.

When you have only so many years left in your life you want to get at real truth. You don't want to patiently wait. You don't have the time to patiently wait for some authority to save you.

And we are not patient to listen to myths and stories about childish gods who roamed the earth thousands of years ago. We want to see results now. Proof now. Before our life is over. Without needlessly wasting time with theories that can never be proven, nor disproven.

But Vedanta had one more trick up its sleeve. One more way to explain why you had to just patiently wait for the king-god or cosmic-mind to wave his grace at you. One more "excuse" for why it was hard to realize that you really already are god, that Atman is Brahman.

The excuse? The world is an huge, giant, grand illusion.

What a great, fantastic excuse! You may have meditated for years, or for decades, and tried to discover that you were god and never been successful. And that lack of success was all because of the great illusion that kept you from that realization. How could you see clearly the god you are when everything is wrapped up in a fog? Try to find your house in a thick fog. Difficult. Try to find god in a great illusion. Difficult.

No wonder few people become realized in life. No wonder swami Chinmayananda told us he was not a realized-soul.

So Vedanta claimed that the ultimate intellectual philosophy is the discovery that the world is an illusion.

We almost bought the idea.

Then we came across the writings of another Indian philosophers, Ramanuja, who argued in his *Commentary on the Vedanta Sutras* that such an idea as cosmic illusion is absurd.

His logic goes like this: Illusion is something that prevents us from seeing things as they really are. So, by definition, illusion is something that prevents us from seeing all things, even illusion, as it really is. That means that illusion, if true, by its definition thus prevents us from seeing if there really is illusion.

In other words, if there is cosmic illusion, or Maya, then it prevents us from being sure about the existence of illusion. We can never be sure. We can never say we “know” with certainty that illusion exists.

So how did those people who originally came up with the doctrine of illusion ever find out about it? How could they have been so sure of themselves? How could they have so dogmatically sworn to others that we exist in cosmic illusion?

They couldn't have been sure. With illusion you can't be sure of anything. So it is a self-destroying doctrine. They can never, ever have “proof” that there is illusion.

Moreover, how could they have ever come up with such an idea as illusion, since that very illusion would keep them from determining the fact?

And even if they claim that “god” revealed it to them they still face problems. How could they know that it was really god who revealed anything to them? Illusion would have prevented them



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for being sure about who, or what, or how or when or where such an idea was revealed.

The only possible answer is that those who came up with the idea of cosmic illusion must have just guessed, or imagined it.

This is one case where religious thinkers get caught in their own little lies about how the doctrine came to them.

Yet, for many faithful believers, the doctrine of illusion sounds like the penultimate of high-minded, deep, significant philosophy. It sounds like a wonderful explanation of the universe. So they never bother to analyze it and “realize” that illusion is like a house built on quicksand. They believe it because it comes down to them with the stamp of approval of religious “authority.” They believe because those at the top of the dominance hierarchy tell them to believe. Because they are conditioned by animal instincts to believe what those at the top tell them.

When we realized that the illusion doctrine was nonsense that was it for us and Vedanta. The final excuse, the reasoning that kept us slugging away for years with meditation, had been destroyed.

Our great “realization” was not what we could have expected when we first went into Vedanta. Our realization was that, instead of a hierarchy of Catholic priests spouting off philosophies about it being good to be meek, humble, obedient and cowardly now we had a hierarchy of swamis spouting off philosophy of how it is all just an illusion.

But this also brought us to a crises point. If even the great philosophical thinkers of ancient India had nothing but bluff, and more bluff, to offer, then was it possible that no human being anywhere had ever come up with a true religious explanation for the universe. Was god, that unprovable idea, just bluff?

What alternative was there? Non-religious or physical theories. But according to this life is about eating. Life lives by eating other life. Life is thus a violent thing, just as the universe is violent with all its big bangs, super novas, magnetic stars, asteroid collisions, planet formation by bombardment, volcanic eruptions and cosmic radiation that destroys everything in its path.

And stars, such as our sun, are violent. They are burning. Exploding. They are super, super, super atomic bombs. They are hot and fierce. They start as nuclear explosions. They are “pretty” or “beautiful” only to a poet stuck in a childhood fantasy that envisions stars as spiritual things (whatever that means).

But we knew about scientific theories before we started our quest. What we wanted was to find a true spiritual theory.

But now we began to believe that there was no such thing as a spiritual universe beyond the physical one. No transcendental reality. No ultimate ground. No god. No cosmic mind.

That left us with nothing.

But nothing is not something to be depressed about.

There is in fact a philosophy about nothing.

So we went off to find out about nothing. That is, the nothing of Buddhism. And the happiness (absence of anything, absence of troubles or an emotional nothing) preached out by Buddhist preachers. We also hoped that the theory of nothing had some basis to it and was not just ancient theory supported only by authoritarian authority.

## **Chapter 4. Middle age, wanting nothing**

If we had been like ordinary people, content with eating, growing, breeding, reproducing, sleeping and looking for physical thrills, or losing our minds in television shows, movies and rock concerts, then we could have been content with just sitting around and letting life pass by. But we longed for some explanation of a deeper meaning to life. So we could not sit still.

But, at the same time we couldn't move either. This was because, after countless dead-end searches among religious, mystical or metaphysical systems, we had come to the conclusion that none of them had an adequate explanation for the mystery of life and mind. Just a lot of nonsense philosophy and mythology.

That doesn't mean that we stopped looking. For example, there were plenty of books available by self-proclaimed experts on the metaphysical. But we felt that most of the authors were just tossing around the same tired, old mystical garble that we had seen before. So we had no clue as to where we might look next for some fresh insight, some verifiable ideas that we could dig deeply into.

Unable to sit still, like most people in the world, and unable to pack up and head out on some new exploratory journey, we just sat around bored and in low spirits. This had never happened to us before. We had always had some place to go, something to explore in our search for truth.

For example, when we had given up our Catholic faith we had launched out after the spiritualist and occultist traditions of the West. Then, when we had abandoned the Rosicrucian faith and our interest in spiritualism, we had quickly stepped away from it and toward the Vedanta and Yoga systems of the East.

But now, after having become disgusted with the philosophical viewpoints, and meditation practices, of Vedanta and Yoga, we were almost in a state of shock. If this great philosophical system of the East was, at least to us, all based on bluff, then what hope could there be for finding anything better elsewhere?

That is, it wasn't just that we didn't know where to explore next, but, more significantly, that we didn't know if we even wanted to go on exploring. Why would we try to explore some other faith only to, probably, discover that it too was a sham? Or, only to discover that, it too, was just another system for teaching the old animal behavior of obedience and patient waiting for those at the top of the dominance hierarchy to decide if they wanted to bless you.

But the advice that one had to sit and wait, (for cosmic consciousness or transcendental merging with god) was, of course, also a good ruse for hiding the fact that their methods didn't produce the promised results. As long as they could tell anyone, "just wait and you'll see results at some distance point in the future," they didn't have to explain away why no results ever came. It was all on your shoulders. You were at fault. You just didn't wait enough. If only you had waited a year more, then, you would have had success.

Of course such “waiting” went against every other example of natural forces known to man, Nobody has to sit patiently and wait for gravity. Nobody has to sit patiently and wait for oxygen to diffuse into your blood cells. Results come quickly in nature: but not in meditation.

Furthermore, if it was all about sitting and waiting, then all the made-up philosophy that accompanied the sitting was irrelevant. We might as well chuck out the philosophy and just sit and wait at home, until some new ideas came to us. And at least that way you’d be free of the remnants of the old king-god system with all this business of sitting and waiting for the king to dispense his favors on his subjects, especially to those courtiers who bowed and flattered him with prayers about his greatness. That is, at least you’d be free of the old animal behaviors of waiting while the head animal, at the top of the hierarchy, devoured all the food.

In fact, thinking about the waiting that devotees do before swamis almost made us queasy. It was revolting to think that humans were debasing themselves to the level of animals, waiting on the head animal, whether you called it king, swami or god, and calling it high philosophy. So at least by sitting alone at home, with nothing to do, without meditating, we felt less disgust than when we had been sitting in meditation, waiting and waiting for some response from that abstract, philosophical version of the head animal.

Furthermore, by waiting at home, for nothing, we didn’t have to torture ourselves with ascetic practices. We could at least enjoy sleeping in a warm bed and eating healthy food rather than living in a damp cave and begging people for some rations. We didn’t have to suffer or neglect ourselves to prove our loyalty to anyone.

Renunciation of “attachment” to the necessities of life is a large part of Vedanta as it is of Catholicism. The typical saint in Vedanta is supposed to be poor and with few belongings, as in Catholicism. And both religions have their legions of ascetics

who practice all sorts of ways to deprive the body of its needs, as if a willingness to deprive themselves of worldly necessities proves their loyalty to god. Swami Tapovanam for example took pride in how he suffered, almost as a proof of his loyalty to god. And the famous Swami Vivekananda once remarked about the human body that it was a “bag of skin and bones walking down the street.”

These ascetics think they are “developing” themselves by torturing the body. But in fact it is really just more vestiges of our animal roots. We don’t mean that the ascetic acts like an animal by constantly being outside, with no human-like tools, crawling into a cave at night or constantly having to search out his food on each and every day. That is degrading enough.

But what we mean is that this “ascetic” behavior is just further examples of the instincts that guide the animals to honor their place in the dominance hierarchies. For the hierarchies to work smoothly it can’t be just a question of the top ranked animals constantly badgering those below them in the pecking order. The bottom animals must not only give up resistance to letting the top animals have the resources. They must also have instincts that push them to feel that it is good and proper that they renounce all the pleasures of the world, and allow them to be taken by the dominant animals. The lower animals must willingly let the alpha animals take the food. Among the mole-rats of Africa the queen enforces this by spraying chemicals around the tunnels but most animals just rely of instinctual feelings that they must give up or renounce resources to others. It is survival of the fittest and the top of the heap animals are the fittest. The species will survive if the top animals survive. Others must help them to survive by willingly living an ascetic life.

So it is only to be expected that world religions, which already incorporate so much philosophy related to the enforcing of hierarchies, would find some “philosophy” to justify this unequal

sharing of resources, this instinct for low status animals to willingly give up worldly goods, and thereby leave them for the top ranked animals. Or as Jesus said, letting Caesar have his due. The some grand sounding name they give to this instinct is “renunciation.” That is, they encourage the ascetic life among the followers of the religion.

Usually the “high sounding” theology continues on with the added advice that you, as a low class animal, should not want or desire to become like any of the upper class animals. To convince you of this you are told that you will suffer if you devote your life to wealth or riches, or in general, to trying to achieve material desires. Indeed, just as Jesus tells us that it is easier for camels to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven, so Hindu philosophers tell us that attachment to worldly goods leads to unhappiness.

Yet no religious thinkers ever state that the most likely reason for why you might suffer, or be unhappy, if you don’t renounce desires and attachment to worldly goods, is that the powerful animals at the top of the heap might bash in your head, or otherwise make life uncomfortable for you. Sometimes they will steal back what you earn. Usually they will never let you have the resources you want since they consider they have a born-into-it right to those resources. Or they might take it from you and knock you down the ladder of the hierarchy, where you will lie weeping and gnashing your teeth. So the priestly advice is that it is always better to not try than risk getting bonked on the head by some ram-like king.

Indeed, when we were Catholic, if we complained about why god, that is, the head animal, wouldn’t share out all the resources equally and end poverty, a priest would never tell us that it just couldn’t happen, since such a thing is contrary to the purpose of the animal hierarchies. Instead they would simply proclaim that it was the mystery of god. And nobody can fathom the way god

works, just as no Hindu can fathom the workings of illusion. Illusion hides the reason for poverty and unequal sharing of resources from the eyes of any doubter. So both Hindu swami and Catholic priest tell us to wait patiently and just accept your station in life since no human can unravel the mystery, the illusion. Translated, this just means that no human can go against the animal instincts of the hierarchy.

But, if you persist further with questioning your religion, rejecting the idea of a mystery and demanding an explanation for poverty and suffering, then the Catholic priests toss out an extra card on the table, the idea that “god is testing you.” He is testing your devotion and your loyalty to him, the king. (Who else could you be expected to be loyal to except the king?)

Of course, few of the faithful Catholics bother to question why a supposedly “all knowing” and “all powerful” entity would ever need to test anyone. If he is omniscient (all knowing) then he certainly knows everything. He already knows if you are a devoted or loyal follower and has no need to check on anything. So obviously that is no explanation. The real answer is that there is no test. The king is just putting you off so that you won’t ask him, the head animal, for a share of the food, just as a low class deer won’t try to get at the food of a high class deer.

Still if the priest persists in his nonsense explanation we can ask what sort of test or examination of loyalty is being given to us by the king-god? If we endure disease, pain, poverty, misery, sadness and so on and “pass” the exam then what do you do with your diploma in misery and suffering? Will you get a better job with the king-god, since you’ve shown that you are hardy enough to work for him without whimpering about it? Not usually. Most of the time, in return for your patient waiting, you get nothing. You stay poor or sick all your life.

But the priests have learned how to deal with persistent trouble-making questioners. They pop up another trick: you might not



get a favor from the king in the here and now but only, perhaps, later on. In fact, probably you only will be rewarded in heaven, or in the next reincarnated life, that is, in a situation that you can't check up on.

Of course they know that you can't go to heaven, or the next life, to see if it is true that you will be rewarded then, and there. Or, if you pester the priest too much you will be punished by hell, or getting reincarnated by your bad karma into a bad next life.

But while you wait patiently for rewards that never come, or are put firmly out of your reach in a heaven or a new life, you still notice that the wealthy are enjoying their fruits now, not later.

The top of the heap animals are enjoying all the resources while you have nothing. Why don't they have to wait for the invisible heaven or next life? The only answer is that they don't have to wait since they are above you on the animal hierarchy and are therefore entitled to them now.

It seems obvious that the doctrines of testing and heaven, or karma and a reincarnated life, are both just ways to get you to stay in your place, not ask for more food and resources, and allow the "fittest" animals to survive.

Well, we didn't give up our Catholicism so that Yoga and Vedanta could supply us with similar nonsense explanations whose only purpose is to make us willingly let others have the good things in life. We didn't go out exploring just to receive more talk, using different words, about being patient and meek and renouncing the world (letting others have it) and waiting loyally for god-king, cosmic mind or illusion to reveal himself when he thought you had proven yourself to it.

We would truly rather have nothing to do at all than have a life where we sit around in caves like animals, begged for food like animals, or practiced the ascetic or instinctual life of the animal through renunciation, letting others have the resources, and

waited for king-top-dog-gods to take things first, while pretending to ourselves that we are practicing a highfalutin, grandiose, magnificent philosophy.

We could, of course, go back to the spiritualist faiths. After all, with spiritualism, and Protestant Christianity, one could at least change the emphasis from having to stay poor and sick all of one's life to that of striving to be rich and healthy, with god's blessing,

We could proclaim we were visited by the holy spirit, join the merchant class – and be full of riches. But the trouble was, we had never seen proof that any of those “spiritual powers” were more than wishful thinking.

It was as if the bottom-of-the ladder poor hoped that, with spiritualist methods, they could rise to the top of the pecking order and do so without physical violence or effort. That is, without having to face the head-butting sheep at the top. No fighting. No wars. Just “spiritual” grabbing of the resources and wealth that was denied them.

It was almost as if these spiritualist sects were congregation places for the rebels, those who are supposed to test the leaders to make sure they are really the fittest animals. But these particular rebels want to be “spiritual” rebels who “spiritually” battle their way up the social ladder. It didn't seem much like any kind of great philosophy either – just a way to fulfill animal instincts without having to act physically like an animal, or at least, while pretending that you weren't acting like an animal.

We would rather stay with our “nothing to do” than follow a system of pretense. Plus we didn't want any system that plunged us back into animal hierarchies.

But, if getting back into the animal world that we thought we had left was the only option available, if going back to join the

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herd was what we had to do, if that was the only way open to us, then we would at least do it honestly, not with spiritual pretense.

If all philosophy was just rules for enforcing for the animal hierarchies and if all there was in existence was animal life, then we might as well become another animal. Start a business. Run a factory. Get a job. Eat. Procreate. Enjoy life.

But we couldn't.

Being loyal Catholics and then loyal Vedanta students we had followed their suggestions to the letter and renounced the world. We had probably followed it further than the priests and swamis had ever intended. Certainly we followed the idea of renunciation further than many Catholic priests ever practiced themselves.

We had been so good at renunciation that we had lost interest in pursuing wealth. We had curbed most of our worldly desires and concentrated on a pursuit of spiritual or godly goals: like a mystical union with cosmic mind. So we couldn't easily just go back to materialistic life. In some ways it felt like a double-cross. We had neither physical goals that interested us nor any spiritual path to follow.

So, our wish was fulfilled. We ended up, truly, with nothing to believe in. With no goal. No view about anything. And, unfortunately, with no activity in life that interested us either.

However, it was tough to just sit around with nothing to do. Only our sheer will power kept us from slipping down into depression at the thought of there being nobody, anywhere, who really understood the deep truth of the universe.

That was when it crossed our minds that, maybe the only value of all the philosophy and religious teachings (beyond it being based in animal instincts) was that it was good entertainment, no more truthful than a good movie. Its only value was to keep your mind off the drudgery and suffering of life, while you sat

around and waited, and waited, and waited some more, until your life was over.

It would have been easy to fall into despair or depression. Why not just end it all if there was no purpose to life. We really felt like we just living for the sake of going on living?

Originally we had had such high hopes. We had wanted to find something better than what all the other animals did. But now that possibility was dead.

Of course we were not alone in having this feeling of emptiness.

Most adults encounter similar feelings when they enter mid-life. At that time their children are gone from the nest and they no longer have to spend their time looking after the kids, worrying about their health, education, mental state, social interaction, and so on. They have a large slice of new found time with nothing to put in it. They feel empty.

Likewise, by midlife, most home mortgages and car loans are paid off. They have the same income but less expenses. Middle-aged adults don't have a lot of the heavy bills that they had when the children were at home. Often they no longer even have to work. They continue at their profession just from habit.

Because of all this emptiness some adults face a mid life crisis. They think of moving or changing work or spouse. Anything to get something "new" in their life. Something to fill up the vacuum.

Of course, a few die-hard positive thinkers never seem to get bored with their life, especially if it involves making lots of money. That is they never seem to get tired of making money. Maybe it's just that they never thought about whether there is any sort of "higher" meaning to life. Or whether there is any purpose to existence other than the eternal animal purposes of eating,

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growing fatter, sexing, raising children and gathering resources - money being the primary “resource” for human animals.

But we always felt, like a good little religious fellow, that the world should be renounced and that our life’s purpose was in religion.

There is a saying: “The bigger they are the harder they fall.” Well for us the saying should have been: “the more religious you are the harder you fall, when you find it is all fakery.”

You could say then that, having realized the fallacy of religions and mystical philosophies, we desperately needed something new to look into, to fill the gigantic hole of emptiness in us.

It is hard to just go through life like a robot – devoid of interest in what you do. Devoid of a feeling that anything is important in life. That even religion is not worth pursuing.

That was when we found out a new nothing.

We read that, long ago, many Buddhists, came to the same conclusions that we had about all the world religions and metaphysical systems. They taught that religious values were all baseless, that is, built on emptiness.

Of course Buddhism is like any other religion in teaching (implicitly and subconsciously) about all the virtues vital to the sustaining of the animal hierarchy and ensuring the king to slave status quo. Many Buddhists couldn’t live without such ideas and so made sure they were brought back into Buddhism.

It is vital to the success of an animal hierarchy that those lower down the ladder follow the orders of the top animals. Thus in Buddhism we find the usual praising of humbleness, meekness, waiting patiently and quietly, not questioning, not doubting, having faith and believing authorities.

Also it is vital to the success of an animal hierarchy that most animals do not challenge the leaders, unless they are a rebel, one of those designated to make sure the leader really is the fittest who should survive. Thus in Buddhism we find the usual bit about how horrible it would be to be a leader. The world is a place of suffering. So there is no point in wanting to “get ahead” in such a world (the way the dominant alpha animals do).

And, it is also vital to the success of the animal hierarchies that those on the lower rungs of the hierarchy renounce the world’s resources and pleasures and thereby save the best for the fittest animals at the top. So, of course, Buddhism includes such an idea of renunciation.

But the idea of “emptiness” so intrigued us that we just ignored all the above features of Buddhism: the parts that are typical to all religions, the parts that relate to our animal instincts.

We were only interested in those more intriguing aspects of Buddhism, the ideas that we don’t find in the other religions: the view that all the above sorts of behavior (humility, meekness, renunciation, and so on), are not grandiose philosophy at all but just empty rhetoric.

Buddhists felt that people, including religious authorities, might follow the above animal behaviors out of respect for “convention,” but beyond that, the theories of religion did not explain or justify those behaviors at all. It was impossible to back up the ideas of religious theories as logically sound, or as having any basis in fact.

But, how did such a concept as this, the lack of support or ground for the religious ideas and theories, ever come about?

To really understand how Buddhism could land on such revolutionary concepts, that basically reject conventional religion, spiritualism, mysticism and metaphysical theories, we need to know two major facts:

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(1) Buddha was a prince, a member of the royal family, in agreement with tradition where gods such as Krishna, Rama and Hanuman were kings. But, Buddha ran away from the royal household. He abandoned that life of the court: being flattered into granting favors and so on.

(2) Buddha, after leaving the palace, was a muni or ascetic (world renouncer), and studied under several Yoga and Vedanta masters. They called him Sakyamuni, the muni of the Sakyas clan. But, Buddha also gave up that life of the ascetic. He abandoned it.

So naturally we expect Buddhist teachings to emerge from this rejection of both traditional kingship and traditional asceticism. And that would include the rejection of traditional philosophical systems about transcendental gods that are designed to justify kingship – the dominance hierarchy.

Buddha noted that those at the bottom of any hierarchy endure much suffering – they are supposed to let all the resources go to those at the top of the hierarchy, the fittest to survive in a world where life is all about the survival of the fittest. So the common folk, outside the king's palace, lack food, are poor and usually unhealthy. The god idea just reinforces obedience to gods who are like kings. It keeps them obedient to those who have the resources and tied down in suffering. So Buddha rejected the god idea in philosophy as a mean idea, one that makes for suffering among the masses.

If you think that you suffer now because you are poor, own nothing, are unhealthy, injured, grieving a loss, lusting after something you can never have, or are enslaved and misused by others, then remember that you will suffer even more if you listen to the advice of the priests and religions and philosophical systems. That is, because the teachings of the religions are all about convincing you to keep yourself loyal to the animal hierarchy instincts, and thus continuing your suffering. And more: loving your suffering.

Even warfare, usually initiated by kings or king-gods, is just behavior based in animal instincts to fight competitors for limited food, water and resources. In human history vast hordes of human animals swept across the earth, killing other human animals, so they could expand to regions of new food, new resources. Usually they were prompted into this by their king.

Sometimes, it looks as if human war is not like war among, say, the merkats of Africa, when one gang of merkats invades the territory or nesting area of another. It looks like human animals are not fighting for food, or for land but for secondary resources like oil. But the oil is to make money for the rich oil investors. And money is to buy food and other things that make life pleasant – for those that have them. So the modern wars still, ultimately, can be considered as animals fighting other animals for resources like food. Even the non-physical wars of internet hacking that go on today are all about trying to grab resources from others. Those who forcefully grab from others inflict suffering on those they take from, depriving them of the resources they need.

Yet, human animals constantly compete with each other. In wars, or just locally when they steal from each other. It is not all just about kings. It is not all just about hierarchies. The hierarchy is only a way to aid the survival of the fittest. But all life, even that lower down in the social strata, still try to survive. So living things kill to survive and that makes others suffer. Even vegetarian animals make plants suffer: they deprive the plants of a chance to live.

But in ancient human societies the king was usually the one who took the most food and started the most fights. Since god is the religion's version of the king (and the parent) we expect Buddha to say something about god.

However, Buddha chose, at the start, not to go directly against the god idea, or argue against the notion of god. That would only



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bring on opponents to fight you or argue with you and try to prove it true.

Instead he thought it better to try to get people to completely ignore the idea of a god. Erase such a concept from their vocabulary. Wipe it out. Treat it as a nothing concept. Treat it as empty of meaning. Empty of validity in any philosophical sense.

So, very often during his life (whether you consider it myth or real history) we find that Buddha rejected considering, or examining, or studying or talking about the notion of god, that is the king-god as some sort of supernatural being or a transcendental entity. He thought that such an idea as god had no basis to it.

Now that doesn't mean he was an atheist. Hindu swamis often speak of Buddhists as atheists, and speak of Buddhism as a branch of Hinduism, a wayward branch to be sure. But that is not correct.

An atheist, from the combination of "theist" or god believer and "a" or not, means somebody who doesn't believe in god. But such a view as "believing" or "not believing" in god is untenable.

To say there is no god means you must have some proof that there is no god and it is impossible to get such proof. No matter how hard you look you can't say you've looked everywhere. So anyone can say you have no proof since you are missing key data. Data you might have got but didn't since you just didn't look in the right places for god. Or you weren't patient, didn't wait long enough for the results to come.

But, on the other hand, neither can you prove there is a god. You cannot prove or disprove that there is a god since it is beyond the possibility of proof or disproof.

In fact the word "god" is defined, as is typical with many mystical and metaphysical concepts, to include the impossibility of proof or disproof. This is because the definition of god includes

ideas like “transcendental” and transcendental means, “beyond the possibility of proof.”

We can understand this perhaps with a simpler example, one that is not so abstract as the notion of a god. Say I define a XE3&82d!2 to be a man made of marshmallows who lives on a world circling a star in the Andromeda galaxy. Prove there is no such thing. You can’t. You might argue that it goes against the normal rules of animal physiology, but who says those rules are normal to that part of the universe. To really prove there is no such thing you would have to go to that planet. And you can’t. By including the idea that the fellow lives in Andromeda we have made the concept into one that is beyond proof and disproof. So, you can’t prove there is no XE3&82d!2 because my definition, that is the way it is defined, makes it impossible for you to prove it doesn’t exist (or to prove it exists).

Or, let’s take a more homely example. Say I define a QW3!!a to be a dish that dances in the kitchen cupboards when nobody is there to hear or see it. Again my definition makes it impossible for you to prove or disprove such a thing. If you were there to see or hear you wouldn’t witness the thing- since the definition says it can only happen when nobody can witness it. Again, the problem is with the definition. The definition makes it impossible to verify existence or nonexistence of this item.

Perhaps the idea is not quite clear enough yet, so let’s look at an example where re-defining a word, that is altering the definition of a word, solved a problem. In this case we first see that some sloppy thinkers defined a “Bermuda triangle” to be a mysterious area of ocean where ships disappear for unknown reasons. Of course others then, accepting this bad definition, spent their time looking for reasons for the disappearance of ships in the Bermuda Triangle and came up with countless theories, including alien abductions, underwater sinkholes, portals to other dimensions and so on.

But then someone rewrote the definition and said a “Bermuda” triangle is an area of of the ocean where more ships disappear than in any other area of ocean. Now the definition made proof and disproof possible since it included the idea of a comparison between the triangle and other parts of the ocean. Someone compared the triangle to these “other areas” and found that no more ships disappeared there in the triangle than anywhere else. By including a way to verify, or check things, they proved there was no such thing. They disproved the concept of a Bermuda Triangle since the new definition allowed for the possibility of proof or disproof.

But can you prove or disprove god? That is, does the definition of “god” allow for proof or disproof? We just have to look at the definition to decide that.

Can you prove or disprove that something is all-knowing or omniscient? How could you? Can you you check “all” knowledge and then check if some thing has all that knowledge? You can’t even write down an infinite sized list.

Can you prove or disprove that something is all powerful? How could you measure the power? Would you be able to witness the “all” power coming at you? Could you say you have seen all the power, or maybe just 99% of the power?

Can you prove or disprove that something created the universe? You might argue that it seems sensible to you. Or you might give a math equation to explain it. But you can’t go back to the “beginning.” Even scientists can’t go back to the moment of the “big bang” to make an observation. So how can you say you “know” what created the cosmos, or even if it was created, rather than just transformed from some other state? Physicists today can’t even scientifically decide whether the “big bang” was a moment of creation or the result of a pre-big-bang collision with another preexisting universe. There are alternate theories about

what happened “before” the moment of the big bang but no way to decide between them.

So by including “all powerful” and “all knowing” and “creator of the universe” in the definition of “god” we make it impossible to prove or disprove that there is such a thing.

The god idea includes so many concepts that are just beyond the possibility of proof or disproof. Nobody can gather any evidence about omniscience or omnipotence or creation of the universe. Nobody can, therefore, prove or disprove ideas like “god” if they are defined in this nonsense way with terms like “all powerful” and “all knowing” and “original creator of universe.”

So nobody can be an atheist, except on blind faith, just as nobody can be a theist, or believer in god, except on blind faith.

Of course, earlier, in Chapter 2, we mentioned that the real definition of God, that is the God of the everyday person does not include such abstract notions as “all powerful” and “all knowing” that are favored by academics.

The practical person’s definition of god is that of the head human animal, the king-daddy at the top of the human-animal hierarchy.

This is confirmed by the average person’s behavior in religion: they flatter god as one flatters a king (hymns of praise about their glory), beg the god for special favors (prayer) as they would beg boons from a king or father, and expect those favors to be granted solely on the basis of the king’s whim (expect miracles). And, most of all, they expect their flattery and begging to result in the king raising their station in life at the expense of others.

The king can only have a few ministers and the head alpha animal can only have a few helpers to control the masses. Thus if one person rises up in the hierarchy it can only be at the expense of someone else. When one rises another must fall.

This court behavior, of knifing others in the back so you can rise up higher in the hierarchy, is indeed the foundation of prayer. The faithful pray for a job promotion- implying that god should deny the position to someone else. They pray for money – implying that god should take the money from someone else and give it to them. They pray for victory in war – implying that god should not give victory to the other side.

Of course people say that they only want a special boon for themselves and just don't think through the implications of their request. They don't consider whether or not someone else might suffer for their gain. But other life always suffers. Even if we pray for health it involves the idea that god should not let bacteria, a living thing, eat you and live. And, if we pray for food (relief from starvation) it means we plan to kill and eat some animal or plant. We get away with an easy conscience only because we have decided that "our" life is worth more (in some undefined way) than the life of others.

The idea of a miracle from god is similar to that of special dispensations granted by earthly kings. The earthly king is the only one in the kingdom or nation with authority to turn aside his own laws and god is proclaimed to be the only one in the universe with authority to turn aside (his) laws of nature -which is what a miracle is.

While most citizens of the kingdom agree to follow the laws of the land, the king might smile on someone due to their flattery and bend the rules to help them out. Likewise while most people have to follow the rules of life and put up with illness or use man-made drugs to combat infection, the king-god might smile on someone for their faithful adoration of him and then “bend the rules” of his laws, that is make a miracle and heal him directly. Treat them in a special way that he doesn't treat everyone else.

Those who believe in miracles subconsciously know they are just a follower, a peasant, while the king-god is the top of the

heap, head animal of the hierarchy. They know kings can bend the rules and they petition the king to do them that special favor. Work them a miracle. Treat them differently than the way that everybody else gets treated. Of course they know of no special reason for why the king-god, so high above them in the social animal hierarchy, would so favor them and expect that it can only be the result of their praise and flattery. Or the result of whimsy by the king-god (thus the story of the whimsical actions of Jesus).

The working definition of "god" for most people, the definition that they seem to follow in their ordinary day to day life, is thus based on the ancient court activity of the kings, and not on highfalutin ideas about omnipotence and omniscience (except in as much as those were expected characteristics of a monarch).

But is it easier to prove or disprove this sort of god, than the god of the academics? Certainly. Now we have features that can be tested. Evidence can be gathered. We can see if there really is evidence for miracles and evidence for someone "bending the rules" to grant special boons in return for your praise, flattery and prayers.

But there are still several obstacles to cleared out of the way before anyone can investigate miracles. We have to be clear that any possible proof of a miracle is not the same thing as a proof of the existence of god. That is, any proof of a "miracle," where a miracle is defined as an exception to the known laws of nature, does not prove that some "god" was responsible for waving away natural laws. It only shows that (a) either the known rules of the universe were somehow overruled or overturned, or (b), more likely, that we don't yet fully understand how the universe operates.

But let's look closer at this idea of evidence. We can prove or disprove things when we gather evidence about them. That is, when we can sense them directly or measure their effects indirectly.

For example, for millions of years the earth's magnetic field had an effect on us, even though we didn't know about it. But because it did have an effect, one day we learned how to measure that effect. That measurement of the effect was evidence to prove the magnetic field existed. So the real criteria for evidence is not whether we can "know" about something, nor even whether we can, right now, measure an effect, but rather whether there is the potential to one day measuring some effect.

Unfortunately, we can't measure or verify any of the properties attributed to god. In fact, god is transcendental, beyond the physical, and so beyond the reach of physical measurement.

Measurement means some effect is recorded. If god can't be measured it means one of two things, either (a) there is no effect from god to be recorded, or (b) there is no measuring device capable of catching the effect – no way for the "god effect" to actually effect us and our instruments.

However, in case (a), that is, if god has no effect at all then he has no influence at all on us or our lives. We might as well then completely ignore any thing like that which has no effect on us.

But, in case (b), if god does have an effect, but we just can't measure it, then likewise he has no way to produce "knowable" effects for us. If god doesn't effect our instruments, and knowing, then how could he effect other things like our health and wealth? Lack of measurement ability in any way means lack of impact on any thing, lack of manifestation, lack of influence on us.

For example, if god could affect something like health then we would have some impact of god on the world. That health impact would be a measuring device to work with: measuring the health effects of god. If we can't measure this effect of god in any way then really there is nothing coming from god to us. We might as well ignore the concept of something which can have no effect on us as completely irrelevant to our life. God is an empty concept.

As an empty concept, we can treat it as we do other unprovable concepts, unmeasurable concepts. That is, ignore them.

But that “ignoring” of the “god” concept doesn’t make you an atheist, or even an agnostic. You can’t be for, or against or even “undecided” or agnostic about every unprovable concept somebody dreams up.

We wouldn’t go around saying we are anti-dancing-dishes or pro-dancing-dishes or “undecided” about dancing dishes. None of those ways to classify yourself make any sense since “dancing dishes” was defined as an unprovable concept.

Nor would we describe ourselves to others as a marshmallow-man-believer or anti-marshmallowian or “undecided” about marshmallow men. We just ignore such things as useless nonsense.

So “god” is another unprovable and un-disprovable concept, on a par with fairies, leprechauns, unicorns, hobgoblins and marshmallow men from Andromeda. We can’t worry about being for, against or undecided about such things.

Sure religious people might like to categorize you as against their religion, and brand you as an a-theists, but you don’t have to accept their branding. No more than you have to accept someone who brands you as an a-UFOian. Or as anti-unicornian. You don’t have to sweat it out if somebody passing by says, “another one of those smart aleck, anti-dancingdishians, who thinks he knows it all.”

Nobody has to take sides over some unprovable concept. They are best ignored and forgotten.

Buddha thus had this attitude to god: Leave it alone.

Don’t bother about it. Don’t argue against it. It is pointless to examine the idea or try to prove or disprove it. If someone asked



Buddha about god he would just avoid discussing the topic and ask them to stop wasting their time investigating such things.

Yet, by ignoring it, and forgetting about god, we can avoid a lot of suffering that comes our way – suffering that comes by letting religions run our life and forcing us to live in poverty while the kings live in wealth. Forcing us to abide in obedience to the kings.

Instead of teaching us to beg our superiors for some small share of the resources, for a relief from our poverty and illness, by prayer and flattery (hymns of praise) and worship, Buddhism implies that authorities are not to be believed.

They shouldn't be believed since all views, all theories, all philosophies are empty of validity. They have no logical, rational or provable basis. No reason to justify them. No objective evidence that supports the validity of the usual "religious" or philosophical theories. And, most importantly of all, most religion and philosophy shouldn't be believed in because they never contain proper definitions that allow anyone to check up on the theories.

Most of the popular metaphysical and mystical concepts and theories are inadequately defined, that is, defined in a way that renders it impossible to prove or disprove the concepts and theories. Impossible to know if they are true or false.

Yet we do know that the result of most of the metaphysical theories is to reinforce the idea of obedience to some unknown force or god that is modeled on the powers of a human-king. That is, that most of the religious theories are meant to keep the masses of people in suffering. Buddha rejected the royal life, and religion whose main function seems to be to support and uphold the royal life, since he thought it wrong to keep people in suffering.

Of course sometimes on our earth we have to "put up with" such things as religion, god, cosmic mind, an ultimate ground to

existence or illusion because of convention. That is, because they are popular in the context of our society, with the masses of people. But we should not take this “putting up with it” to heart. All these metaphysical ideas are only imaginative story telling meant to keep us suffering. There is no god-king, no father-god, no mother-god looking out for us or needing us to work for them.

Well, that sort of philosophy, of the emptiness of the god concept, fit in nicely with what we had learned in our journey of exploration of religions. As far as we knew, the idea of god was just a story produced by religious authorities to control the masses.

But if one should reject religion and thus not be a loyal and “ready and willing” pawn of the king, then how is society to function? Should we be a rebel instead, that is someone who wants to be a future king? But a rebel is someone who wants to replace the present king and become the next leader. That just returns us to the situation of having some one person in charge, getting all the resources, with others, ascetics, living on nothing. And Buddha left both kingship and the ascetic life.

But why should we even have a system with one or a few individuals in charge at the top? Maybe the animals came up with such a system because they are too concerned about individuals? But what is the other alternative?

The system of the king and the ascetic, the head animal and the masses of low class animals, might be the “animal” way to ensure survival of the species but is it the best way? If the goal was survival of the species then shouldn’t we look at the species as a whole for an alternative solution?

It seems that the best way to have a harmonious, well run society is to have harmonious relations between the members of society. What is important is to ensure smooth operation of all the complex relations existing between all the members of society. That web of relations should be the main focus of “advanced” an-

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imals and not some one leader, some one individual, whether head animal or king.

For Buddha the individual is not important. The web of relations between all the individuals is important.

In fact, Buddha wondered if we can even define such a thing as an individual. Perhaps the individual is only “definable” as a member of society, as a member of a huge, complex web of relations?

What, for example, is a baker, except someone who provides bread and pastries to “others.” Thus a baker can only be defined in terms of relations with others.

The idea of a separate individual, defined in terms of itself, or in terms of an “essence” inside it, something that makes it into itself, or gives it an identity, something in it that defines it, is thus foreign to Buddhism.

There is no “essence of baker” that can be used to define a baker. That would make for a bad definition, a definition that involves something unprovable. How can you discover such a thing as an “essence of baker” in a baker?

Likewise, there is no “essence of bread” that can be used to define bread. Bread is defined in terms of its relations with all those who make, eat, sell, store and transport bread and its ingredients. In terms of the “context” in which you find bread and in terms of the use to which bread is put.

The idea of the essence of a thing, an internal substance that makes it what it is, is rejected by Buddhism. That includes the rejection of the idea of the “essence” of a person, or a soul.

Just as Buddhism considers “god” an empty concept so the “soul” as a self-sufficient, self-defined thing is also an empty concept – beyond the ability to prove or disprove. Of course, converts from god-and-soul religions, like Hinduism, couldn’t bear

to be without their childhood gods, spirits, demons and personal souls. Because of that, they tried, sometimes successfully, to reintroduce ideas like god and soul back into Buddhism. So today we see some Buddhist cults where they bow down and worship Buddha and other saints.

Yet most Buddhist philosophers were quite firm in saying that “god” and “soul” are empty of real existence – as permanent, eternal or self-made things. For example you could say your chair was made by someone, through laws of cause and effect, but god and soul are supposed to have been “never” made. They always were.

And that’s a problem. Buddhists say the world is always changing and, by cause and effect, things are always being created and destroyed. So there are not things that “always were.” God and soul are empty of existence if you think of them as some thing that “always was.”

Another way to explain it is say that anything that “always was” or was uncreated by anything else, unstarted by cause and effect, has an essence. The essence is the unchanging part of the thing (the “always was” part of it). Yet to be “always” means it is eternal and unchanging and static and permanent. And nobody can live long enough to prove some thing is eternal. So the idea of essence doesn’t exist.

The Buddhists say this as: any thing with essence can’t exist. That is eternal, permanent things can’t exist.

Nobody can stay around for eternity to prove eternal things always existed and always will exist. Nor, also, can they stay around for eternity to prove they “don’t exist.” This means that the Buddhists have no right to say these “eternal” things exist or don’t exist. Nor do they have any right to say some things are empty of essence or empty of real existence. Just because you

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haven't seen it doesn't give you the right to say something doesn't exist.

So what are the Buddhists trying to get at here? To us it seems they are fighting to understand this concept of how anyone could claim to know about things that "always were."

Modern people probably wouldn't express things in the way the Buddhists did. To us, when we examine and analyze the Buddhist notion that god, soul, and any thing with "essence" that supposedly "always was," are all empty of existence, it seems to us that they are really saying that those concepts are badly defined.

Today we'd probably rephrase the Buddhist statements and say, instead, that the difficulty with god and soul lies in the fact that you can't define what you mean by god or soul, or things with essence. You can't make a list of "testable properties" or attributes that they have to satisfy. You can't test omnipotence nor can you test omniscience.

You might be able to make such a list of "testable properties" for an ordinary thing, like say gold, by saying it must be yellow, soft, shiny and so on, but you can't do this for god.

If you try to list properties for the definition of god or soul you get into nonsense metaphysical concepts like eternal, permanent, static, unchanging, and so on. If you think god or soul satisfies this type of list of properties then you immediately run into difficulties – you have no way to check those metaphysical properties.

You can check if some thing is yellow, and maybe gold, but you can't check if some thing is eternal or "always existed" and was never "created" by cause and effect. How could you check that? You would have to be eternal yourself and devote all your time to checking to make sure you didn't miss a single split second in all of eternity when god might have been created by something else. The property is nonsense.

But, the early Buddhists didn't seem to realize that the real problem with most metaphysical concepts, like god and soul, is that they are just badly defined. That is, that they have definitions that make it impossible for anyone to prove or disprove anything metaphysical, for example that any thing is a god or a soul.

Instead they thought the problem was with the concept of existence of self-made things. They believed that anything with essence, that is that always is and always will be, just can't exist. Of course, it's almost the same explanation... nonsense things don't exist.

They said everything and anything in the universe can't have any essence or it wouldn't be able to exist. For example there is no essence of a chair, no essence of a rock, no essence of a horse – there is nothing in a chair, rock or horse that “always was.” These things come into existence or are created by cause and effect and then die out, or go out of existence, by cause and effect—they are never “always there” or “always existing.”

Horses are not “always there.” They are born, change continually over the course of their life, degrade and die. We see no example of any “existing” thing that is “always” static and permanent. Nothing with any “essence.” Nothing that seems to be self-created. A horse seems to have been created from it's father and mother, and food in its environment as it grew from a fetus in its mother, and from a thousand other factors. A horse is not self-existing. It thus has no essence of horse in it.

Essence is a nonsense idea, badly defined. But the Buddhist said, “all things are empty of essence.” All things are empty of existence if you think of those things as always having been.

Yet they still have to deal with explaining the universe. How can you do it?

You do see things around you.

Yet you can't say all those things in the universe by saying they all have some essence to them (used to define them by their properties). If they all had essence (always were and never changed) then we would not have all the impermanence that we obviously see in the world.

If you can't define the things in the universe by essence (properties that always were with them) then how can you define them?

Buddhism came up with 2 fundamental concepts to explain the universe: dependent origination and dependent designation.

The dependent designation, perhaps better explained as dependent definition, explains that things (and processes and procedures) can only be explained with reference to their context, their relations with uncountable number of other things, their changing nature over time and how they are applied or used.

For example a baker is defined in terms of the context (bakery, city or town of people who need food and eat bread and so on), its relation to others (farmers who supply wheat to the baker, millers who grind it to flour for the baker, fertilizer makers, merchants, stores, buyers and so on), and how they all interact with each other. Plus the definition must include how the baker concept is applied to the person doing the baking process. The complete designation of what we mean by a baker is thus a complicated web of references and factors all connected together.

The dependent origination idea continues the thought started with dependent designation or dependent definition.

It suggests that anything exists only because of (cause and effect of) other things, and likewise contributes to the origination of thousands of other things in a huge web or nexus.

For example say you went to the store. If we ask why you went there, it seems that it didn't originate with some intrinsic

item in you, no “essence” of store going. The idea to go to the store came because, perhaps, your spouse mentioned that there was no bread left, after they looked in the cupboard, after they saw a food ad on television, while their stomach was growling, and while they were thinking about getting up and calling their aunt, who last week had mentioned to them she had a bread recipe, that she had obtained from her friend, whose mother loved bread, and so on and on and on in an infinite chain of cause and effect. And that is only a small part of all the intricate web of causes and effects that could have played out, originating the action of you going to the store for bread.

The huge web of relations is all that exists for Buddhists. All the individual items are empty of existence- they can be defined only by reference to the web.

A baker, for example, can only be defined by reference to the web of origination (cause and effect) and not by any “always were” qualities that make him “always” a baker.

Furthermore, our idea of what a baker is changes throughout history. What a baker did in 1630 and what a baker does today may be very different – for example it no longer includes heating brick ovens.

But Buddhists also said that it isn’t just philosophical views that are empty, it isn’t just concepts like god and soul, or the idea of essence in things, that is empty.

They also thought all our personal, inner thoughts and feelings and emotions are empty.

Empty, in the sense that we have no real reason for holding most of our present feelings and thoughts. Why do you hold onto the idea that the air will always be there to breath? You have no reason. Maybe it always was so you imagine it always will be.



And why do you hold onto the idea that you are depressed or afraid? Sure, maybe an hour ago you saw a tiger but it is long gone. So why, now, this moment, are you still afraid or depressed? You have no real reason for holding the feeling now. It is empty of a reason. So you should empty such feelings from your mind.

When we look at the world we see it through all our prejudices and childhood indoctrinated views about reality. Buddhism says we should empty out those pre-judgments.

And what will we find in the emptiness of our empty mind? Things that exist only for fractions of a second. In other words, things that don't really exist at all. Thoughts come, and go. Feelings come and go. Where do they come from? Where do they go? If they don't exist at any time then do they exist at all?

Who knows. But if you try to pin down a thought or feeling, like a feeling of depression, it seems to escape. It has nothing solid to it that we can capture and examine. You can't capture your depression the way you can grab a glass of water. You can't hold the depression and examine it. As soon as you try to examine it, it disappears, only to come back when you give up. So does it have any existence. Buddhists think it is empty of existence.

So, why worry about something that is empty of existence. If a tiger has existence then it could harm you. But a unicorn or flying horse has no existence and can't harm you. Like wise feelings like fear, anger, depression have no existence so why worry about them harming you? Just ignore them. Or try to examine them as curiosities

How could something be said to exist if we can't point at it and say, "there it is." And you can't point at things that vanish as fast as they appear – as they move from future to present to past faster than you can blink.

But then all things change. The river of a minute ago is gone. You have only the water of now to look at. So what part of the river is the real river? You can't see a real river since the river exists, not as something in itself, not as an essence, but as a ever changing thing in relation with other ever changing things.

So all things, thoughts, feelings and objects of the world really have no existence, except as changing parts of the whole web, in relationship with all other things. They are empty of existence – on their own.

Everything is empty of existence in that sense. All you can really say about the world is there are relations and non-stop comings and goings, a big web of events that happen.

All you really experience through your mind is the constant time web of coming and vanishing events (that seem to involve things) but you can't stop a "thing" and try to keep in in the "now moment" so you can examine it and see that it exists. Wherever you hoped to find an object you would only find emptiness – the thing gone a half second before, changed to some other thing by cause and effect.

And the "you" that wants to examine the "thing" in the "now" or present moment can't stay around long enough- the moment passes to the next moment. The "you" that wanted to examine it in that last "now" moment is gone – it has become another "you," the next "you" of the next "now" moment. So it is technically impossible to examine things that exist only in non-stoppable moments.

Well, it seems quite fitting that a philosophy which proposes the idea of ending suffering, by focusing on harmonious relations of a great web between people (instead of on king-subject dominance hierarchy), would then end up by declaring everything existed only as a part of a huge web.

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Furthermore, we have to be clear about one thing: For Buddhists, the web exists but the parts don't.

They would say that a baker is a big nothing, empty by itself. A baker only exists in the web of all the buyers, bread eaters, millers, ovens, flour, and so on.

And that leads naturally into a complementary idea.

If you are in an ever-changing web of relations with others then you can best interact with all others if you all have compassion toward each other. If you all try to understand the problems that others might face. So compassion is a vital part of the Buddhist view of existence.

Buddhists, however, look at that view of society (a web in which we must be compassionate) as too static. They thus extend it to include relations between things in time as well as space. That's where cause and effect come in in the dependent origination of things and events.

And, just as there are only relations and no individual items with existence at any point in space, nothing with existence of their own (they can only be defined in terms of other things), so there are no real static, or stationary, moments in time. No "now" moments. Moments in time are also empty. That is, the "now" doesn't exist by itself, it exists only in a vast time web of relations with all other moments in time. Or, you could say, the "now moment" exists only in reference to the overall flow of time from past to future.

You constantly pass through a long list of infinitesimally small (empty) moments in time. From one moment to the next you are never the same. You constantly change. Cells in your body die and are replaced by new ones. You are not the same today as you were a few hours ago. Even your mind changes as new memories come and old ones fade.

Each moment you die and are reborn. You can't point to any fixed time and say "there I am." You are a connection of relations between items in various moments of time. No essence, that is no fixed, unchangeable "you," exists at any fixed, unchangeable time. So where is the "you" that is supposed to exist?

Life comes in. Stays awhile. Then rots. Nobody has ever seen any life form that lives eternally. Life is impermanent. We live only a few years. Even if you live to 90, rather than go out at only 50, you are still going out one day.

But yet new life (children or progeny) come out it seems. Is your DNA the part that makes you eternal? Is the DNA eternal? Not at all. Even whole species go extinct. And eventually life itself may disappear from the earth. Or at least be reduced back to the unintelligent bacteria that ruled earth alone for the first 2 billion years of earth's 4 billion year history.

Anatman. No Atman, says Buddhism. It is an empty concept. Try and define it. It is only defined in a way that makes it impossible to check.

How can you check for a surviving, eternal spark in a universe that lives moment to moment? From one now to another now.

To check for something eternal the universe would have to be a continuous present and not a series of moments.

The nature of the universe as change makes it impossible for you to investigate a smooth, unchanging or continuous eternity.

But, while Buddhism says the "god" idea is not worth talking about, this time Buddhism takes a stand and says positively "no Atman, no soul" instead of what it should have said: "impossible to know about." While with god it didn't take such a direct stand but only said, "useless to consider such a concept."

So while in Yoga and Vedanta they try to gain realization of the truth that "Atman is Brahman," or the individual soul is cos-

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mic or universal soul, the Buddhist might shake his head and say, “What Atman? What Brahman?”

To a Buddhist the Hindu project is like someone saying, “I want to show that Godzilla is a fire-breathing dragon when in fact both the concepts, of Godzilla and dragon, are pure imagination.

So when we had tried, for decades with Vedanta meditation, to discover that “Atman is Brahman” or that “soul is god,” we were really off on a wild chase, seeking the impossible. No wonder we (and several famous swamis) had never had success with this activity.

But Buddhism goes much further than that. It also attacks the notion (dear to non-religious spiritualists) that life has some great purpose to it. It says life is empty of purpose.

All the activities of life, even as it exists, seem quite pointless. The purpose of life seems to be only to keep life going. Life eats. Humans also eat and drink. Why? So they can continue existing, continue to eat and drink some more. And maybe grow bigger and fatter. Life eats other life. Human life eats animal life and plant life. Why? So life can go on eating more life the next day. And those who get eaten suffer the pain of death.

There is no grand purpose to it beyond lie eating so it can continue eating. Life exists just so it can continue existing. All the examples we have of living things suggest that life is simply there to go on.

However, life reproduces. Just as soap bubbles reproduce in bath water. Humans reproduce, producing new humans. Why? So life can continue reproducing in the next generation. Life exists just so it can continue. There is nothing higher as a purpose to life beyond that it is something that wants to exist and wants to go on existing. Something that holds the unreasonable view, the non-sense view, that it could be eternal.

And does lower life even know that it “wants” this? Or does it just do it? Do soap bubbles “want” to divide into other soap bubbles? Or does it just happen?

So life is empty of purpose, unlike what some mystics think.

In that case anything you do is just as good (or rather just as useful) as anything else.

Writing a novel is no more significant than fixing a toilet. Both have a local purpose to the local person interested in doing them. Each does what they want, writing or fixing a toilet, because they want to do it. Because it satisfies a need of the time. But neither task has any great cosmic significance to it. And when they die the “achievements” of both writer and plumber will fade.

Homeless people who spend their lives on the street are living just as “valid” a life style as those who spend their lives getting rich.

But, in another sense, all and any activity is pointless. Life is temporary and impermanent. You might spend 40 years building a business and then die, leaving your children to break apart the business you sweated so greatly to build. One person’s great goal might be another’s wasteful extravagance.

In the Buddhist system of emptiness we realized that it was silly to fret about having nowhere to go and nothing to do but sitting home and doing nothing. We shouldn’t feel we were useless because we did nothing. We were no better nor worse than someone who built 10 factories, gained 5 university degrees, ran a business empire, made a billion or became famous throughout the world. There is no cosmic significance to any of those acts.

Each participant in life just does what pleases them, and then watches as life leaves them and all their success and fame fades.

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Humans do what they do simply so they can go on doing the same things year after year- and for no other reason.

There is no “ultimate” purpose to anything we do. All life’s activities are empty.

In the *Pancavimsatisahasrika Prajnaparamita* it is written “Honorable Suhbuti, is there no goal.... From the perspective of the highest meaning, however, there is no goal.”

The highest Buddhist goal originally was Nirvana. But the word “nirvana” really means “snuffing out.” Exterminating. Ending it. So monks who try to meditate to achieve “nirvana” are really just trying to empty their minds of everything.

In one sense a Buddhist is the ultimate non-political rebel. He attacks all order. He attacks all views about the universe. Shows they are empty. He attacks the idea of god. Shows it is empty of meaning. He attacks the idea of soul. Shows it is empty.

In the Madhyamaka school of Buddhism even meditation has taken on a new purpose. The Yoga and Vedanta meditation (though really only useful as a way to stop worries, fears and negative emotions, as explained in the previous chapter) supposedly is done to realize the identity of soul and god. But the Buddhist meditation is done to realize the emptiness of existence. Nirvana.

Of course, at the start of a career in Buddhism, the Buddhist meditation is done to strengthen mental powers of concentration, being mindful of what you concentrate on. Or letting the object of concentration be fully in your mind. But, later on, once you have developed that mental power with mindfulness practice, you must use your new found mental strength to discover the emptiness of everything.

However, advanced Buddhist meditation, called Insight meditation, continues the Yoga practice of watching your thought pa-

rade. But while the Yogi wants to get behind thoughts and emotions in order to find the “deep” ground of the universe, the “essence” of existence or the cosmic mind, the Buddhist does nothing of the sort.

In fact the Buddhist is not really even interested in the surface thoughts and emotions that bother us. They instead want to get at the deeper parts of our subconscious – to the hidden “ways” of thinking, the instinctual behaviors, the prejudices and assumptions about yourself, others and even life that were drummed into us when we were children.

So while the Vedanta meditator searches or sifts through thoughts and feelings, with discrimination, crying out “not this, not this” and hopes that whatever is “left over,” once he discards all the thoughts and feelings, will be the ground of the cosmos, the Buddhist shuns such a method. Instead he tries to sift through the deeper behaviors and habits. But not to push them aside and reveal the real “truth” below. He wants to instead get them out in the open and prove to himself that there is nothing to them. The Yogi meditator looks for the “left over” after sifting out thoughts, emotions and feelings while the Buddhist meditator looks for the emptiness left over. The Yogi or Vedanta meditator hopes to find the ground of existence the Buddhist meditator hopes to find that it is all emptiness.

Still, a few people imagine that with Buddhist meditation they are then going to “experience” an emptiness. That is not the case.

There is an old Buddhist story meant to explain this. A man goes into a shop and the shopkeeper says, “today my store is empty, I have nothing to sell you.” So the man replies, “well then give me 2 pounds of that emptiness stuff.”

There is no “stuff of emptiness” to be experienced in Buddhist meditation. Emptiness is emptiness. You can only experience the “absence of” something, not absence itself. We can experience



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the absence of our shoes. We can experience the absence of our friend. If the shop is empty you don't experience absence you experience absence of goods for sale.

So we don't experience absence, we experience "absence of." To experience pure absence you would not have a mind. You would be asleep or dead. And then there would be no experience.

Thus Buddhist meditation is not like Vedanta meditation or Yoga meditation where one expects an experience -or realization. A yoga practitioner expects to experience the transcendental ground of the world or world essence, or Brahman, or your self-soul-Atman.

By comparison, all that happens in Buddhist meditation is that you convince yourself that there is no essence to anything – the shop is empty. All that exists is not things but just a web of relations at an impermanent and brief moment of time, in the now. This is called deconstruction of the universe.

In Madhyamaka meditation we try to "deconstruct" our self. We try to discover that there is no "essence" of soul in us. We look at every emotion and thought and tear it apart to see that it doesn't exist, except in relation to everything else and to all the other moments of time. It is empty of existence. And we tear open our feeling of being a self, an Atman. To discover it is all empty.

So then what? What does it get us to convince ourselves that there is no foundation to anything? That everything is empty?

What does it get the shopkeeper to empty his shop of goods? It makes him poor, with nothing to sell. And that's about it.

Another story explains this idea of de-construction of our reality in a vivid way. You sit on a tree branch and saw off the branch you sit on – de-constructing the tree.

The only lucky part is that there is “nothing” to fall onto below. So you don’t hurt yourself when you fall. You just fall forever.

But there is not even a forever to fall through. Nor can you even say you are falling.

So it is quite pointless to really think that you are discovering nothingness or emptiness below the branch. That would be completely useless.

De-construction of your “self” (un-building all your prejudices, habits, ways of thinking, even instincts and so on – to show there is no reason behind them, no reason to go on holding such views) shows you there is nothing solid in it, that the real “you” never exists. How could something real exist if it lasts only a moment and changes the next moment?

But what is the point of discovering that? The goal of deconstruction can’t be just to find the emptiness of your self-hood and then leave it at that.

It is simply a way to get you to expose in yourself all those empty, baseless, deep-seated, unknown habits, instincts, prejudices, assumptions about your community, your life and your world, that are built into you, indoctrinated into you when you were born and for which you have no real justification. To show that you have no real reason to believe in them.

For example you might realize that you always thought it important to eat 3 meals a day and now see that you accepted such an idea, not because you saw proof of its validity, but only because someone once told you about the idea. There is no foundation for such an idea beyond your decision to believe it. When you realize this you can freely discard the idea.

That is, the de-construction style of meditation, gives you insights about yourself and frees you from being victimized by

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unfounded prejudices and assumptions. You can “insights” about your self.

Even scientists influence their results unconsciously by their prejudices about what they expect their experiments to produce. But insight meditation would then make you a super-scientist, completely free to really see things as they really are without the shade of your mind affecting what you think you see. So Insight meditation is ultimately a practical thing- allowing society to function smoothly because each member of society is not encumbered by prejudice and negative thoughts when they deal with others.

After we realize that everything is empty, we don’t vanish as emptiness. We just lead a life that is more free of prejudice and assumptions.

Once you are free of all the made-up ideas about the universe (god, soul and all the false religious ideas) and all the made-up views about life and consciousness and the universe, and even free of all the baseless habits, ways to experience things and tendencies to want things, then you can be free of suffering. And once free of suffering you can live more harmoniously.

However, it is hard to believe that “seeing things as they are,” as empty, will free you of suffering.

There doesn’t seem to be any connecting link. If I see a tiger as it really is does that free me from suffering? Not if the tiger gets you. Yet that is the Buddhist theory.

In fact later Buddhists, of the Mahayana schools, decided that it wasn’t even worth while to saw off the branch you sat on, that is to enter into Nirvana, where your mind is emptied out. To them the ending of suffering was the most important thing. So they suggested one should forget about Nirvana and emptiness and just go back to the original concern of Buddha about ending suffering and bringing harmony in society. Just live your life, by

staying in the present moment, in the here-and-now moment, but with compassion for all other things in the web of existence in which you live.

That means, also, one should forget about pursuing high-minded philosophy and forget about the pursuit of truth. The only truth is to what is useful in the here and now of your present moment of existence.

For example, say a chicken sees a farmer coming every morning and bringing it food. It decides there is an ultimate truth that the farmer is a good person who loves chickens and will always protect them. This is confirmed for the chicken when he witnesses how the farmer goes on feeding it for a hundred days in a row. But one day the farmer arrives and slits the chickens throat and eats him as dinner. Was the chicken wrong about truth? Ultimately (meaning outside the local existence of the chicken) the chicken was wrong. The farmer did not always protect chickens. But yet the chicken was right in that his “truth” was what worked in his daily life. The chicken didn’t know, couldn’t know, about the activities of the farmer after his death. His truth was local, context useful, applied truth.

Buddha thought it pointless to worry about what was outside your daily life. Outside the here and now. It was better to empty your mind of such thoughts about the unknowable future, since all you could come up with is imagined events, that would make you worry and suffer.

Any person looking for some “ultimate” meaning to life, some “ultimate” purpose to life, a plan behind existence, soon finds there is nothing.

What did Buddhism really give us then? It told us to stop our search, since there was nothing to find, and then just live out your life.

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But, beyond that, the teachings showered us with compassion – the Buddhist compassion so essential to making society run smoothly.

This compassion of fellow Buddhists simply consoled and soothed us in our emptiness. Whispered sweet nothings to us. Told us that we weren't alone in realizing a great emptiness and so should be happy at least in that.

Chinmayananda once said that life is a long walk from the cradle to the grave. Optimists just pretend it is not so and go on living. Buddhists say it is so, but so what, and go on living. And they pat you on the back “compassionately” and say, “at least we're all in the same boat, all the same in our emptiness.”

And, if you asked a Buddhist how he would deal with despair or depression about finding the world just emptiness, what would you receive as a response?

Well he would probably just tell you depression is empty of existence too. It comes and goes. It changes. The nature of depression changes from moment to moment. So the depression of one moment is not the same as the depression of the next moment. You could even say it is not the same depression anymore. If it isn't the same, having changed, then in what sense is it anything real? In what sense is it anything to worry about? You might as well worry about imaginary unicorns as worry about depression.

So why worry about some feeling that doesn't really exist. Just tell yourself the depression is a nothing and only part of a web of events that also includes who you think you are. So empty out the empty depression. Empty out the empty fear (over finding the world is empty) and stop suffering.

Perhaps the idea of meditating to empty out your prejudices, tendencies (vasanas), habits, feelings, emotions and assumptions about life can be explained with an analogy. One day you exam-

ine your house and determine that you have no need for the cooking pans and dishes. You eat out anyway. You only had the dishes because everyone else did. It was tradition. Convention. But now you recognize that and so empty the house of dishes.

Then you realize you have no need for the stove and refrigerator. You only kept them because you had been told since birth that there must be a fridge and stove in every house. It was expected that you had to have them if you had a house. Now you realize you don't need them and empty the house of them.

Next you examine the television and stereo. Unneeded. Convention. Clear them out. Empty them. Then you realize you don't need the furniture. There is nothing wrong with sitting on the floor. You only had a sofa and chairs since you had assumed, under propaganda from others, that you had to have them. Out they go. Empty them from the house. And, after that you do the same for the beds.

Soon the house is empty of goods, except for the bathtub and sink and toilet. But some people can live without those. Our ancestors, the pioneers, didn't need them. Who says you need them? Convention. So empty them. Clear them out. And soon you do the same with the inside walls. Who really needs to have smooth gypsum walls inside the house. The outer wall keeps out the rain. You don't really need the inner walls. Take them out.

Now you stand in your empty house and sing out the words, "I'm free. No more conventional concepts in my house. All this emptiness gives me a great view of the "reality" of the house for once.

Then you ask, "what now? What's with the empty house?" So a House Master monk tells you, "go for more, you haven't emptied it all yet." But you insist, "what will happen then? The house is already quite empty."

The monk's only answer is, "you will be free. In House Nirvana. You can clearly see, without obstructions." Beyond that the monk has nothing to tell you.

Oh, no, wait, he can give you his compassion.

He can tell you, "I felt bad for you that you suffered with that house full of conventional but unnecessary things. And now all that is gone. But you are still unhappy? So now I give you my compassion and advise you not to feel bad about seeing an empty house."

After that, the monk has nothing more to give you. Nothing. Since he too is empty. So he can't remove the depression (feeling there is nothing worth while in living). Depression is a feeling of emptiness.

That indicates that you can just as easily suffer or be depressed when faced with emptiness as you can when faced with a crowd of false prejudices and assumptions about what you think you need.

So it's hard to see that the process of emptying out everything, or seeing the emptiness of all views, will take away your suffering.

The only really significant advice seems to be the one given by Buddhists before you ever started to clear out things, empty them, on the path to freedom (emptiness). That was the advice: Stop suffering and be happy.

If you suffer because there is emptiness then empty out the feeling of depression too. But how?

If you can't empty out the feeling of emptiness (depression), then practical Buddhists advise us to add back in one thing: happiness.

Thus there are many Buddhists texts devoted to this idea of “happiness” or lack of suffering. Being happy seems, then, to be the only thing to do in life (while waiting till life reaches its unavoidable end).

So we decided to go for happiness. To that end (goal) we went back to spiritual exercises. Meditations. Visualizations. But this time it was not for any goal, not for any purpose. Not to achieve anything. There was no “success” to be gotten out of the meditation. Not even de-construction of the self and the universe.

Even scientists who test meditation claim that it is useful, not for religious purposes, but for reducing stress, or helping you relax. That is, for making yourself happy.

Throughout the day we keep happy thoughts with us. We sometimes imagine something like an Aurora Borealis inside us or around us, or a ray of sunshine enveloping us. Illuminating. Spreading outward from us toward the whole world.

Of course, it's pure imagination and not reality (or a new, better reality to replace the old depressing reality of emptiness). It's just an exercise that makes us happy and not for any other “purpose.” So we aren't pretending this is reality, as religious priests often do with their myths.

Even when we are not able to sleep at night (a common complaint of many retired people) it doesn't make us worry. We drown out old memories of troubles and sufferings. We keep a positive attitude. We keep the Aurora Borealis of happiness around us.

Let the body rot as it has to. Let disease conquer us. It doesn't matter. Inside we are happy. Happy, as a way of life. Until the time comes when we go down into the ground to turn back to dust (and nothing more, nothing remaining) our hobby is to be happy.



And, strangely, by feeling happy you become happy. You even think that there is a better life ahead. Something nice happening soon. But there is nothing magical, spiritual, psychic or metaphysical about it.

Being happy makes your brain happy. There is an increase in the secretion of “happiness” neurotransmitter chemicals in the brain. The brain’s nerve cells have almost changed. Or we imagine they have. But it doesn’t matter if it is reality. We feel the happy brain, on its own, trying to generate happiness, the way the subconscious brain makes you walk without your effort.

When you’re happy you don’t care about the suffering of the world. You don’t mind what the human animals of the world are doing. If they destroy the planet, as they are doing, it is unimportant. The world will end one day anyway. You and they will die one day anyway – and then what of their animal urges to be above you in the hierarchy. It is useless activity. But you, meanwhile are happy while they are worried. Those at the top of any animal hierarchy, or pecking order, know they always have to be on guard, on the lookout, watching for competitors and challengers, for people trying to replace them at the top.

But you don’t see yourself as anywhere in the animal-human hierarchy. You don’t see yourself as run by animal instincts and urges. You don’t even eat as much as before. You see yourself as free. As happy. As happiness itself – not at all as an animal.

Is this the way to a higher evolution for mankind?

Well happy people still get stomped on by others. Others haven’t changed. Other humans still run along as prompted by the animal urges, instincts and tendencies. They still compete. They still want to dominate. To knock you down. To prove they are authorities in the hierarchy. And you must obey.

Even Buddhist monks over the centuries have been murdered off by authorities. Sometimes by the millions at a time. No spiri-

tual forces saved them. Even trying to “be happy,” never saved them from this fate.

But then, who cares? We will all die one day. Who cares how it happens? We can still be happy till then. Empty out the cares and worries about how others might harm you.

Is this Buddhist emptiness, or nirvana, turned into enlightenment?

But there is still doubt. Human beings are intelligent creatures – we have minds. Can we be fully content (happy) by only using our mind to be happy and for nothing else?

## **Chapter 5. Retirement, trying to lift yourself out of nothing**

To the average person in the west “emptiness” is a problem. To Buddhists “emptiness” is a solution.

When we retire from our job we find our life suddenly empty. It is not just that the noise of work is gone or that we are alone whereas before we were surrounded by our co-workers. Or not even that we no longer have all the busy work – we can always find something to do, whether house repairs or hobbies or travel. The biggest feeling of emptiness comes since we have no goal, no reason to do anything. You don’t “have” to hike through the forest, the way you “had” to have a contract ready on time. You don’t have to cook a gourmet meal, the way you “had” to earn a living. You have nothing that must be done. Their life seems just a shadow of its former self. They feel their life is just an emptiness.

Some people even fall into despair and depression when they see nothing to look forward to, or no hope for the future. They believe they have no reason to go on living.

Others, though, spend their retirement in looking for replacements for work – a different job, a hobby, or traveling, or reading

mysticism. They want a “solution” to fill up the hole of the emptiness in their lives, to take away the pain of emptiness. They scramble after new friends, new interests, traveling, hiking, reading, and much more, as some way to solve the problem and get rid of the terrible “emptiness.”

Buddhists, though, believe that life is and always will be full of suffering and thus try to rid their life of suffering. They think the best way to do that is to empty out all their habits, tendencies and desires – if you don’t want anything then you won’t suffer when you can’t get it, or when someone takes it away from you. For example, if you don’t desire money then you won’t suffer when your job disappears or when someone robs you.

From the Buddhist point of view, then, the problem with the feelings of emptiness that many get when they retire is just that they haven’t emptied out their lives in the right way. That is, they have emptied out physical things (no children any more, no job, no mortgage, no car payments) but not the mental and emotional thing like the desire to want money, physical goods and so on (which advertising makes us crave).

They would say that there is no point in not having people all around you, constantly interacting with you, if you still “desire” a lot of social activity. There is no point in not having the latest mobile phone or computer if you still have a “habit” of wanting to “keep up” with others, competing with them, and “proving” your status and position in the social hierarchy. There is no point in not working if you still have “tendencies” to want to work under pressure and stress and with deadlines in front of you – if you still have tendencies to “like” that sort of life.

So for the Buddhist it is really not the physical things but just all those habits, tendencies and desires that make you suffer. They make you suffer since you want what you can’t have. Or, at least, for the retiree, can’t have anymore. For instance, nobody will hire you anymore once you are over 65 and, even if some did, you

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might not, physically, be able to keep up with your mental desires and habits – or maybe you could, but only for a few more years.

So the Buddhist solution to the empty feeling at the time off retirement would be to empty out your life even more. That is, to the forced emptying out of jobs, money, children we should add the emptying out of our attitudes, tendencies, habits and views about what is important in life, and what it is important to do with our life.

“Emptiness is proclaimed by the victorious one as the expulsion of **all** viewpoints” *Madhyamakakarika*, xiii,8

We had developed views, over the last 60 years, that there was such a thing as some “ultimate” or “supreme” purpose in life, and in the universe, and along with those some tendencies to search for such an ultimate purpose. But our inquiry into religion and philosophies had forcefully knocked that desire out of us. They were all empty of valid explanations that could satisfy us.

But, like someone in retirement, we had only really emptied out the physical – the religious organizations.

The Buddhist solution, when applied to us, would also be that we had just not “emptied” our life enough, or in the right way. We still had these “tendencies” in us to want to look for “truth,” and instead of just emptying out all the theories and philosophical views about the universe (the physical things), we should empty out these tendencies in us. That is, we hadn’t really followed the theory of emptiness to its full extent.

Well, maybe. But we weren’t satisfied that this Buddhist idea of “emptiness” was right.

In fact what the Buddhists seemed to mean when they said “empty” was really, probably, what we meant when we said, “negate.”

So, using that sense to the word “empty,” we had really been following Buddhist practices for years when we were “negating” all the theories of Christian, Spiritualist, Yoga and Vedanta authorities as false and invalid.

In fact the idea of “negating” or “disproving” some idea or theory even fits in nicely with the methods of science. In science, and in academics in general, people often try to disprove the proposed theories of others. As well, one useful method to show that something is not true is to provide a counter example – an example that negates a theory, or shows that it is wrong.

For example, you may believe that firecrackers are harmless toys. But one day your child blows his hands off with a firecracker. One day. One example, or rather one example counter to your theory, is enough to prove your idea wrong.

Or you may believe that Canadians are polite – meaning that “all” Canadians are polite. Then one day you meet a Canadian who is rude. That one example proves that not “all” Canadians are polite. It destroys your theory. Of course, you may claim that that person was an “exception.” But that is exactly the point – the exception negated your theory about “all” of them being polite.

If you insist in still believing your theory, it only means that you choose to ignore the evidence that disputes your theory. Or, perhaps, unconsciously, you modify your theory to “most” Canadians are polite, or “everyone but him” is polite.

But, whether you want to admit it or not, the counter example (example that goes counter to or against your theory) has shown your theory as incorrect. As philosophers say, it negates the theory.

Yet you wouldn’t be alone in refusing to accept the results of negation. Even scientists don’t always want to accept the fact that theories can be so easily negated or destroyed. For instance most

scientists believe in Newton's theory of gravity and yet the orbit of the planet Mercury told us that the theory could not be correct. Later it was replaced by Einstein's theory, which could correctly explain Mercury's orbit, but still some scientists refuse to give up the older theory, and insist on applying Newton's theory, saying it is "useful" for many purposes or right "most" of the time.

Psychologists have even discovered that, for example with religious beliefs, the more one argues against some theory, the harder the believers cling to the theory. The more evidence one shows that a system of belief is full of errors, the harder the believer's hearts grow in defending their religion.

It seems as if nobody, scientist, religious fanatic or average person, likes negation. In our popular culture "negation" is even looked down upon, while so-called positive thinkers are praised.

One of Ray's brothers once had a theory (backed up by his lifetime of experience) that all Ford automobiles were not good cars. Yet just one example of an excellent Ford was enough to destroy his "theory." But instead of putting aside his disproven theory, he resented this intrusion on his prized idea. So he just ignored those examples that proved him wrong, since he wanted to believe in his theory. He firmly insisted that he was right – because of his years of experience.

He just forgot that experience proves nothing. One example does not prove anything. Even 100 examples or a lifetime of examples cannot prove anything. We can toss 100 coins and experience a situation with 90 heads and 10 tails. It can, and has, happened. But that does not prove any theory about the coin being bad. This is just how the laws of chance work. Sometimes you'll get 90 heads in 100, sometimes only 10, sometimes 52.

Yet, just one example can disprove an idea. Getting 90 heads in a toss of 100 coins disproves the idea that heads "always" come up 50 percent of the time.

Bertrand Russell gave a famous example of how no number of positive results definitively proves a theory, but one example is enough to disprove it.

In his example, a chicken sees a farmer bringing him food every day. So the chicken develops a theory that the farmer is a good person. He thinks his theory is correct since he always sees the farmer bringing him food, day after day. Eventually the chicken has 300 days of “data” to prove his theory – 300 separate experimental results, 300 days of evidence of the farmer bringing him food. He is confident of his theory (based on a lifetime of experience) – or, as scientists would say, based on “repeatability” of experiments.

Then one day the farmer arrives, breaks the chicken’s neck, and cooks him. One day. One example, or rather one counter-example (counter to or against the chicken’s theory) will completely destroy the chicken’s theory. So 300 examples, or 1,000 examples or even a million results can *never, ever* prove a theory right.

Yet just one example is enough to prove a theory wrong.

That is the power of negation. That is the power that was used by Buddhists to disprove all the theories and views of the various cults and religions that existed in India centuries ago.

That is the power of negation that we used ourselves to prove to ourselves that no religion known to man has any correct theory about life and the universe.

But, of course, negation when carried to the extreme of negating everything will leave you with nothing, or emptiness.

Yet we hadn’t been able to negate everything. We did have something: that principle of negation.

The Buddhists seemed to have reached the same conclusions as modern science: that negating views or theories is a useful



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method for searching into “truth” or, rather, for dispelling “un-truth.”

Go to any scientific convention and you will see the scientists, apparently, at one another’s throats. They criticize. They look for errors. They look for mistakes, for problems with the way someone’s experiments were conducted, or for difficulties with the interpretation of the results of an experiment.

Then go to a Buddhist monastery, where they train new initiates, and you might also see them at each other’s throats. They criticize. They attack the logic of an opponent.

Plus, just as scientific writings (in scientific journals) are full of attacks against someone’s experimental results, so Buddhist writings are full of attacks against those proposing various theories. They often go as far as calling someone names: you are “stupid” if you believe that, you are “wise” if you believe my way, you will never achieve nirvana with such a view, and so on.

This similarity between science and Buddhism told us that there might be something worthwhile in Buddhism. Maybe negation (emptying) of views and personal habits, tendencies and beliefs was the right way to seek for “ultimate truth.”

But there was more to this similarity between science and Buddhism than just the use of negation. Like the Buddhists before them, the modern scientists recognize that almost any theory will eventually be negated.

In science we know that today’s favorite (peer-reviewed and peer-accepted) theory may go in the trash bin tomorrow.

Earlier on, at the start of science, many scientists didn’t accept such ideas, and some even imagined that we were learning the true and definitive scientific laws of the universe, laws that were always true and immutable. This of course was to be expected since these early scientists came from cultures that ac-

cepted dogmatic religious ideas, especially ideas of a static universe governed by an eternal, unchanging god who created according to law.

But today, after seeing Newton's rules replaced by those of Einstein, which were then replaced by those of Quantum physics, and so on, and after seeing Darwin's original theory of evolution altered by new findings about mutation, and then new views in genetics and then by new ideas about DNA, and so on, we now know that all theories could be replaced by new ones at any time.

And, as Russell's example of the farmer and the chicken shows us, we know that no theory (scientific or religious or of day to day usefulness) can be proven with absolute certainty.

Just as Buddhists are ready to toss out any view, so scientists today expect that science will frequently have to discard old theories. And of course, that puts scientists at odds with the old time thinkers (preachers and priests) who usually uphold a static, fixed, unchanging theory of the universe and are closed-minded about new ideas that challenge their static beliefs.

In fact many preachers of traditional religions think of it as a great failing of science that scientists have to be always updating their theories. Thus, just as scientists poke at each other's theories, so the religious preachers like to poke at the theories of science and show how they may be in error or in need of revision. Then they imagine that, in finding faults in different theories, they are somehow destroying science itself. Yet, in fact, by using negation, the preachers are actually confirming scientific method. They are only being scientific themselves. They have half-converted themselves from religion to science and the scientific method of negation and the constant challenging of theories.

Once while in the Okanagan region of British Columbia we met a devout religious woman (a big fan of swami Yogananda) who scolded us for being too open-minded. She evidently knew

nothing about how scientists are open minded. She told us, “you’re still looking for the truth because you haven’t found it yet. But I’m not looking anymore since I found it.” Of course the only thing she “found” was the teachings of Yogananda. So, as a true fanatic she recommended that we read some of his books.

Unlike Buddhists and Skeptics who even call each other names, scientists never should scoff at any ideas, no matter where they come from. This is because, for all they know, in a few years someone might show those berated ideas to be better (temporary) explanations than the current, peer-accepted ideas. Thus, being open-minded and ever-searching as scientists should be, we of course read the texts of Yogananda that this lady suggested to us.

Unfortunately as scientists we were more than open-minded. We were also prone to criticize and negate theories. So we didn’t find any “truth” in Yogananda’s views at all. Not the least bit. Just a lot of superstition and fables about the (unverified) supernatural wonders performed by swamis.

In fact this Yogananda didn’t even seem to have been motivated by a desire to search for the ultimate reality. He just blindly went along with his childhood belief system. And, that born-into-it system included his unquestioned and unexamined acceptance of whatever his “adored” masters told him. Thus if some “master” appeared to him in his childhood monastery he always assumed they had come to him by spiritual methods and never bothered to check if they had arrived by plane, train or car the night before.

Like her cherished Yogananda, this lady devotee was the very opposite of an open-minded scientist who is constantly ready to reject old theories for new ones. She had the typical, old-school attitude of the closed-minded religious fanatic who thinks their system has all the truth, and no other system has any.

However, the Buddhists also, like the scientists seem to have this openness to listen and investigate. But they listen and then investigate (usually by inner analysis or meditation rather than in outer experiment) not to prove something but only so they can ultimately prove those “new” theories to also be wrong.

The scientists, though, sometimes want to accept the new theories for their temporary usefulness. Thus we might want to accept Maxwell’s wave theory of electromagnetism because we can use it in inventing things like television, radio or satellites, even though we may know that Feynman’s theory of quantum electrodynamics accounts for more phenomena.

In fact, Russell’s example, of the chicken’s problem, could be used to show, not that experimental science can never prove anything, but rather that experimental science can never establish permanent or absolute truth.

That would mean that we can only have local truth: truth local to some local area of space and time. That is, temporary truth.

And that is just what scientists were already discovering as they learned that Newton’s truth had to be replaced by Einstein’s truth and then by the truth of Quantum theory, and so on. Newton’s theory is thus not “absolute” truth.

But, yet, Newton’s theory is true, locally – outside of the area occupied by the planet Mercury for instance. And the theory of Russell’s chicken was true, locally – in a 300 day period and in the chicken house, but not in the farmer’s house.

This idea of local truth of course goes against the generally accepted ideas of philosophers (raised in a tradition of religions that believe in absolutes) who think only of truth as absolute.

This idea of there being such a thing as “absolute truth” changed only slightly with the pragmatist philosophy. Pragmatists believed that truth was what was useful. For example it was use-

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ful to the chicken to trust the farmer, so he could get his daily ration.

In that sense “truth,” as what is useful, is a relative concept - relative to the circumstances in which we want to use some theory. But what do we mean by circumstances except some place and time? So it is probably better to not call it “relative truth” but to rather call it “local truth” – local to some time and some place.

Buddhists expressed this idea by saying that there is conventional truth. Truth is truth only as far as it is useful in some social context and for some particular purpose, and in agreement with what people, by common convention, agree to accept as true.

So it seems that the idea of emptiness, as an emptying out or negating of past views, habits, beliefs, theories, assumptions about life and the universe, is not all there is to this “emptiness” idea of the Buddhists. They also seem to believe in the idea of a local or conventional truth that one can use in day to day life, even if you think it “empty” of ultimate validity.

If that is the case, then emptying out everything in your life is not the complete Buddhist prescription for riding your life of suffering, including the emptiness that comes to us at retirement (or at the moment when we feel no religion has validity).

At this point, to gain some clarity on this matter, we can summarize the characteristics of both scientists and Buddhists as:

(1) empty out or negate views, criticize, give counter-examples, discredit, disprove theories and views,

(2) be ready and willing to give up any and all theories and views, accept no view or theory as permanent and absolute,

(3) be willing to listen to new views and investigate them (for a Buddhist perhaps only so you can disprove them),

(4) think of truth as not permanent, unchanging and absolute (as religious thinkers and mystics do) but as local, local to some time and space.

Or as temporary but useful. That is, accept views if they are useful at the moment.

If we want to apply the real Buddhist and scientific method to our empty feeling (and our despair and depression over finding religions of little help to our search for truth) then we have to do more than just “empty” out our feelings. We have to apply all 4 of the above characteristics – and not just try only the first step of negating.

We can’t just try to empty out even more tendencies and habits, and even empty out the empty feelings. We have to also, in accordance with item 4 above, be willing to accept temporary theories and activities that help us live our life.

To put it another way, swami Chinmayananda once said, in his usual joking way, that we shouldn’t say, “I can’t eat ice cream. I’m too holy.” We can eat ice cream, or do what we want to do in life, if it is conventionally acceptable and in line with our temporary, local values in life.

Local truth allows us to do anything we want, locally – that is, anything that is proper in our local culture, society and environment. The only catch is that we shouldn’t believe (despite what authorities tell us) that there is some absolute truth that supports our actions. Or, that our behavior is sanctioned by some god or divinely inspired mystic, or even in accordance with some universal law of the universe. Our actions are just local animal behavior that seems to work locally for some tiny blobs of dust existing in a small local patch of the universe at some brief local moment in time.

Local truth allows scientists to use Newton’s laws to put a satellite into orbit around the planet Jupiter, even though they know that Newton’s laws are only pragmatic truth, useful local truth, and not absolutely valid. Local truth allows Buddhists to accept that objects exist in the world around them, even though

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they think those objects don't exist except as parts of some larger dependent-arising system.

So to follow the complete scientific or Buddhist method, we can't just plunge ahead and try to empty out, or negate, all values and all theories about the fundamental, deep nature of reality.

We have to keep some theories and values, but only as locally true, as useful to living. We can for example, if we want to, believe in the power of praying to a god, but not because it is absolutely true, but only because it helps us face an otherwise scary and insecure life. If we can't face the world on our own, if we can't muster enough strength of character to act in the day to day world without whining and shaking, then it gives us some false courage (placebo effect) if we believe a local (useful) truth that some divine being has got our back. The general public might not need crutches but, locally in the space and time of an invalid, they are useful.

But, since truth is relative and local, that also means that we can't force our beliefs on others or try to convert them to our way of thinking. Yet humans frequently do this – when the instincts and urges of the animal hierarchy overpower them.

For example the native Americans had a perfectly valid local belief system and yet the Catholic conquerors, thinking their own beliefs were absolute and not local, forced the indigenous peoples to abandon their local system and take up the beliefs local to Europe in the 1600s. The result was the destruction of the self esteem of the indigenous peoples.

All because the European Catholics thought they occupied a higher position on the hierarchy of the human animals. And that included the assumption that, as superior beings, they had absolute truth rather than just local truth.

So far only science and Buddhism have stumbled on this idea that there is no absolute truth, even though they have not completely implemented the notion in their behavior.

Buddhists, for example, still think that if you keep emptying (negating) all theories, values, habits, tendencies desires and so on, that it proves something. Or rather, that by that process you prove something to yourself. You don't.

This is because we can apply the same reasoning to their program that we do when showing that science can never prove absolute truth – Russell's farmer and chicken example (actually a counter example). Thus, even if Buddhists spend a lot of time, with various methods such as reasoning, logic or meditation, to show that 100 or even 300 views or theories are empty, it proves nothing. It is quite possible that view number 301 could be the one that breaks the neck of your investigation, the one for which there is evidence of its truth.

If a chicken is fed for 100 days it doesn't prove that a chicken will "always" be fed; it only proves that a chicken was fed for 100 days. And, if a Buddhist shows that 100 views or theories are empty it doesn't prove that "all" views are empty; it only proves that he has negated 100 views.

So just as no scientist is entitled to say that some theory is absolutely true, so no Buddhist is entitled to say that his theory is absolutely true: his theory being that "all" theories or views are absolutely false and that "all" things are empty of self-sufficient nature.

Some Buddhists, obviously assuming that it is possible to negate "all" then go to a final step that they call "emptying out emptiness." But, that phrase simply means that after you use negation (emptying) to disprove theories about god, soul, self and so on, well then, as a final step, you should also negate the false thing remaining, that is the idea that you had any right to negate



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other theories. It is sort of like erasing your steps as you walk and removing all traces that you were ever there.

As a result you are supposed to be left at the absolute finishing line of the “race to erase”, at the final end of the original task of emptying out “all” things.

But you can never get to such a step. You can never accomplish the task of negating everything. You would have to live to infinity to do that. And even then, if such a thing were possible, you would find in front of you, still to be tackled, task infinity plus one.

Thus, while Buddhists think they are “practicing emptiness,” they are only fooling themselves. They still keep one absolute view around – the idea that you can reach the absolute end of the project of emptying or negating views.

That means they haven’t quite divested themselves of a belief in absolutes, just as many scientists still think they are discovering “absolute laws” of the universe.

In fact, a belief in the idea of absolutes is as much a part of Buddhism as belief in the value of negating or emptying out.

For example some Buddhists have come up with a so-called two truths theory. They say there is the conventional (local or temporary or cultural) truth and absolute or ultimate truth, that we referred to above. All the usual theories of ordinary, common people are part of local truth- they are empty of being absolutely true. But beyond that Buddhist thinkers still keep (for themselves) an ultimate truth.

So what kinds of views are part of ultimate truth? Nobody can say, since it is too “ultimate.”

But more importantly, the idea of ultimate truth is there to serve as the goal. When you have negated or emptied out “all” views the only thing left is the “ultimate.” It is similar to saying

that after counting out “all” numbers, 1,2,3,4,... you end up where? At infinity. So in the 2 truths doctrine the everyday or conventional truth is like the numbers and the “higher truth” is like the infinity at the end, an ultimate goal.

Without this ultimate truth there would be nothing left after emptying out it “all.” It is like a sort of reassurance that the end of meditation is reachable or doable.

Without “higher truth” the Buddhist meditation to negate things would have no “ultimate” purpose. Without this “ultimate” a Buddhist meditator would have to be content with emptying out a few views, perhaps emptying out 100 views and then giving up his efforts. Why would he continue after that? Why would he stay a Buddhist?

What purpose would he have in continuing on? Where would negating 1000 views take him that negating 300 views didn’t? And Buddhists want to have some ultimate purpose in meditating. And they want to believe they can empty it all, absolutely.

However, how can we have the absolute truth that all truth is not absolute, except the absolute truth, our goal. (But some would say there is no goal, that a goal is also an empty idea, but then why continue with meditation?)

That of course takes us to the question: What do we really mean by absolutes?

Buddhists like to talk about absolutes in the same way that other religions do. They use terms like “ultimate, supreme, highest, inexpressible, inconceivable, transcendent, beyond, above all, the all,” and so on.

And all these terms refer to concepts that are defined so as to be beyond the possibility of verification. In that sense they are like the concepts of “all powerful” and “all knowing” that we saw earlier.

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With local truth we can use words like high and higher. We can say that a particular mountain is 3000 meters high or John is higher than Mary. And we can even use words like “highest” if we confine the meaning to some local context, as when we say Mary scored the highest mark on record, or Everest is the highest of all the mountains on earth.

But because we can use terms like “highest” to express local truths, like highest mark in the class, we often misapply the idea as if it could be used to express absolute truth. We can sloppily say things like “Mary had the highest mark” or “Everest is the highest mountain” and “Bill is the strongest” and then extend the idea to imaginary concepts, like “God is the highest truth.”

The idea of a “highest” or “ultimate” or “supreme” can, and should, only be used locally, in some context. We can have a “highest” mountain in Canada, a “supreme” leader in a local fraternity, and an “ultimate” reason for missing school, but we can’t have any universal, unqualified, highest, supreme or ultimate. That is just an outright misuse of the original meaning of these words – words invented for local use.

Mystics and Metaphysical thinkers imagine that, since in comparing mountains we can have a high one, a higher one and a highest one, that, somehow, the concept of highest can be applied to abstract concepts in local context (as in the highest morality of the church), and then, even outside of local contexts (to things like highest truth). But it can’t. That stretches out the use of the words beyond their original meaning, and without an explanation for what the new usage might mean.

As well, with the original meaning, applied to local truth, we can verify the correct use of the word. We can for example verify that “Everest is the highest” by comparing it to all other mountains on earth – we know the local context in which this fact is true. But we can’t test “Everest is the highest in the universe” since we can’t check all mountains in the universe. In fact we

can't even determine how many mountains we would have to compare against Everest.

So, of course, if we can't even check up on statements about concrete things like mountains, then how can we expect to check up on statements about abstract concept like truth or god?

If you can't verify "highest mountain" then how could you verify "highest truth" or "ultimate reality" and so on?

Such ideas are just the result of a wrong application of terms. Because the idea of "highest" seems familiar to us we think we can apply it wherever we want. Because we can apply "highest" to mountains, as local truth, we think we can then also apply it as absolute truth and to abstract ideas.

But we only know through comparison, using ideas like higher and highest. But that just means we know by looking at or comparing something to other local things. And with most personal experiences, such as our experience of eating or our experience of talking with a friend, we only assume some common reality by comparison of common local experiences. We note whether we experience the same things that others "say" they do.

The word "apple," for instance, refers to a fruit having a long list of characteristics. But, an "apple" is also something we can point to and say, "that" is apple. It has a reference point in our experience. And we compare with others to see if they agree with us about what the word "apple" refers to.

But ultimates and absolutes have no referents. You can't point at some thing and exclaim, "there's an absolute," or "there's a god," as you can point at an apple and see if everyone agrees with you that it's an apple, in comparison to say an orange or a pear.

How can we all agree then with each other about what we mean by some concept such as "ultimate" truth? There are no referents, no points of comparison, no points that others can use to

check on to see if they are all using the term in the same way. In other words, phrases like “ultimate reality” and “highest truth” are meaningless combinations of words – mere word play. A game where one tries to combine words in strange ways and see if the result could mean anything.

Some mystics try to confuse the issue by claiming that all the nonsense word combinations involving absolutes, like “ultimate truth,” do make sense and if you don’t understand what they mean then it is because language is not adequate for the task. What?

This is an important point so we will repeat it.

Mystics abuse language, create meaningless words , and then, when people don’t see any meaning to these jumbled words, when nobody can give a description of what the jumbled words actually mean, they blame language as inadequate – rather than blaming themselves for abusing language. They create a phrase like “higher truth” and when you ask for the meaning of it they claim it is impossible to give the meaning, impossible to describe what they mean, because the concept is so ineffable and language just can’t tackle it. Words and thoughts are inadequate for expressing concepts such as the highest truth.

Of course after constant repetition the words will sound familiar to us and we may then imagine that the jumbled words do have some sense to them. But if someone presses us for the meaning we can’t give it. All we can say is the cop-out that “you have to experience it to know.”

If we want to play the same game as the proponents of ideas like “higher truth” and “ultimate reality,” then we just have to abuse language and invent a strange phrase like, “noisy blue truth” and, when someone asks what it means, claim, “it is beyond the power of words to describe.”

Well, of course such ideas are beyond explanation, but not for the reason usually given: that words are incapable or not up to the task. Words are inadequate to express concepts like "highest truth" or "ultimate reality" or "noisy blue truth" not because there is anything wrong with words but because those particular words or word combinations that seem to speak of "ultimates" and "highest truth" are just a lot of meaningless nonsense. And that is because they originated as a misuse of words.

It is as much an abuse of language to speak of "large truth" as to speak of "heavy dots," or "well-cooked colors" or "salty energy." It is not a problem of insufficiency of language or logic if humans start speaking of "fast commas" or "courageous automobiles" or "higher truth" or "ultimate reality" or "singing dishes." It is a problem with humans not understanding that you can't just sling words around, jumble them together as you please, and always get meaningful results.

Yet the situation is somewhat clouded by the fact that sometimes words about superlatives, absolutes and ultimates do get used in our language to refer to abstract concepts. For example there is the concept of infinity in mathematics.

However, the usual use of infinity in mathematics is not as it first seems to be. Only a few people, like G. Cantor, have tried to work with "infinity" as if it were just another number.

More generally, in mathematics, despite first appearances, we never actually deal with infinity. We never say for instance that  $x$  has a value of infinity the way we say something like  $x$  has a value of 5. When the word infinity comes up it is always in the context as "approaching infinity" or "going to infinity." We call these things limits. Thus we never say, for example, find the value of the function when  $x$  is infinity but always when  $x$  approaches infinity.

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What mathematical use of “ultimates” like infinity tell us is that we can’t “have” infinity. We can’t be “at” infinity. We can only approach it. Infinity is not a number. It is the limit of numbers.

But in metaphysics they want to eat their cake and look at it too. They don’t want to say, “as power approaches to infinity,” but assume they can say, “the power is infinity” or is omnipotent. And that makes no sense. Power is a local concept too.

Likewise mystics don’t want to say, as a mathematician would, “as presence in space expands or increases toward infinity,” or “as presence approaches the infinite, the everywhere” but rather, “as presence is everywhere.” That is, they think that omnipresence is a valid concept when it is not.

The mystics don’t think that our knowledge can only increase and increase and “approach to the infinite,” but also want to imagine that knowledge can be infinite: all knowing.

But of course, while it makes sense to say we are gaining knowledge and hope to approach toward infinite knowledge, it is not possible to have infinite knowledge. There is not enough time in which to do it. And so, of course, we can never verify that there is infinite power, infinite presence, infinite knowledge. Could you verify them? What we can verify is “approaching to infinite knowledge.”

Similarly, though we can’t see the highest mountain in the universe, or get our minds wrapped around the concept of the “highest truth,” we can still imagine “approaching it.”

Unfortunately most of the words of mystics that refer to “ultimates” don’t employ this idea of “approach to the ultimate” and are thus badly defined. They like to speak of “ultimate reality” and “highest truth” as if such a thing could exist instead of speaking about approaching to the highest truth.

However, even then, most of the mystical use of ultimates still doesn't make sense. What can it possibly mean to say that we are approaching the ultimate truth?

Some Buddhists would reply that we are negating theories, emptying them out, one by one, and doing more and more of that, and therefore "approaching" the "ultimate" situation of having negated all views. In that sense they should clarify that "ultimate truth" is not a fixed final result. We don't and can't reach a final stage, after infinite tries at it, of zero views. So ultimate truth is a limiting approach, a process, and not a final realizable state or condition. Ultimate truth should be redefined then to be "approaching to ultimately have zero views and only that process of approach and never the final result."

When we have a high mountain, a higher mountain and a "highest" mountain we didn't have to say "approaching the highest" mountain. So nobody bothered to alter the definition when ideas like "supreme" and "highest" and "ultimate" were applied to abstract concepts.

Yet "highest truth" can only ever mean: "approaching or going toward more truthful and more truthful and ever more truthful data." And what can that mean? It is nonsense.

How can you really "approach" truth (zero views) by negating? Does that make sense? Will Buddhist emptying or negating get you to within even a hair's width of the infinite or "ultimate truth."

Imagine that you can start out by negating one view or theory at a time, one habit or tendency or assumption about the universe, one after another, for years and years. Can you reasonably expect to get to the end result, the ultimate truth of having negated out an infinity of possible views? Obviously not, just as you cannot get to infinity by counting: 1,2,3,4,5,6,...10,000....100,000 ....



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100,000,0000 and so on. You'll never arrive. You don't have infinite time to count to infinity.

The words referring to "ultimates," as in "ultimate reality" and "ultimate or higher truth," just don't make any sense even in the mathematical sense as "approaches" or limits. You can't really approach to ultimate truth. A lifetime of meditation is still a long way from infinite meditation.

So is language inadequate to express concepts of ultimate and highest truth or even that of approaching ultimate truth? Definitely, because language is never good at expressing a deficient jumble of words that together give no meaning.

The situation is as if someone said there is a two-headed one-headed man and then blamed the difficulty in describing such a beast on the insufficiency of language, saying language just can't describe what this beast would look like. Language is just not up to the task since the two-headed one-headed man is indescribable or inexpressible by language. Or, they could claim the two-headed one-headed man is incomprehensible. It is a transcendent concept. It is unconceptualizable.

Well none of the above "analysis" of the situation is correct at all. There is no problem with language.

The two-headed one-headed man is inexpressible (try and describe what it would look like) not because language is "incapable" of doing the job, but simply because the concept is created by a jumble of words. It is indescribable in words since it is an out-and-out abuse of the rules for defining words.

As an example of how metaphysics and mystical words are just an abuse or misuse of language, we will look at one of the so-called "proofs" that god exists that were popular with Christian philosophers in the middle ages. We will consider this proof in detail since, even today, some metaphysicians wrongly think that the proof is valid.

To help us understand what is wrong with the "proof of the existence of god," it is worthwhile to first introduce the steps of the proof through another example. That is, we try to separate the logical steps from the particular word, "god" since that word often clouds people's minds.

To that end then, in the steps of the "proof" we won't at first use the word "god" or the idea of "omnipotence" or any other quality usually connected with the god idea. Instead, of "god" and "power" let's say we use some invented word "ErtX" and another word, "wine."

To begin the "proof" then we define some unknown thing called "ErtX" to be the most powerful wine. Now you might ask for more details. Is it a red wine? A white wine? Spanish or French or German. There are no more details to give. That is the full definition. ErtX is the most powerful wine. Period.

But still you might ask what is meant by powerful. Are we saying it is the most powerful in some special area of the world, or at some time? Do you mean the most powerful wine in Europe? Or the most powerful during the 18<sup>th</sup> century? And, furthermore, what do you mean by powerful? Do we mean it has a high alcohol content? A strong flavor. Sorry. There are no more details to give. The full, and complete, definition is: ErtX is the most powerful wine.

At once we should realize that we are dealing with a badly defined concept. There is nothing in the definition of ErtX that allows us to point at anything and say, "there is an ErtX." Nor is there anything "measurable" in the definition. Nor is there anything in the definition that allows us to make a decision about whether or not we have found an ErtX.

Furthermore the idea of the most powerful is something that can never be proven nor disproven. That is because it involves

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the idea of infinity. You can never know that you have the “most” powerful wine until you have tasted “all” wines.

That means that there is no way at all for us to know if we have or have not an ErtX in front of us, or whether we have proven or disproven that any wine is an ErtX. Our whole definition of ErtX is a bad definition. It is a nonsense definition.

Now back to the middle ages so-called proof of god. They start off with a similar definition. Instead of “wine” they use the word “being,” that is an existing thing. So they would say “let ErtX be the most powerful being.” Then they go further. Instead of the unknown (unknow-able) empty word ErtX they put in the unknown (unknow-able) empty word god. The then start out with the definition: “let god be the most powerful being.”

Immediately, following our line of thought about ErtX as the most powerful wine, we see that this so-called proof of god is starting out with another nonsense definition, a definition that does not allow us to decide if we have or have not experienced god. For example, how do we measure if some “being” is the “most powerful?” Do we keep measuring beings for infinity? And what do we mean by powerful?

But not having the advantage of modern insights into language the medieval philosophers didn’t know that they started their “proof” with a nonsense definition.

But let’s look at their proof anyway. Again, to understand it, we will return to our example with the ErtX wine. After the nonsense definition we continue and say. “If ErtX did not exist then some other wine would be the most powerful wine.

It seems to make sense. But what is it really saying?

Remember that ErtX is just a made up word. What it refers to is given by the definition. To say ErtX does not exist is to say there is no thing that fits our definition.

So there is no “other” that could be the most powerful. Any “other” would be something that fulfills the definition, and hence an ErtX.

That means the statement “if ErtX did not exist then some other would be the most powerful wine” is saying “if there is no ErtX then there would be an ErtX.” Double talk.

Another way to look at it is that the statement says that there must be an ErtX. (That is we assume there is an ErtX. We are not proving it at all. Just assuming it).

So when the medieval philosopher says, “if god does not exist then some other being would be the most powerful,” he is saying, that if nothing fits the definition “god” then some thing fits the definition “god.”

He obviously doesn’t understand language or is using language to confuse those “unenlightened” or “un-priestly” people below him in the social hierarchy.

But again, we see his double talk simply means that he assumes there is a god. He is not proving there is a god at all but just assuming there is.

The “proof” however still has some further steps. Again, with the wine example, we have: “But that existence of an “other” would contradict ErtX as the most powerful wine.”

Actually the other would be an ErtX, since it meets the definition of an ErtX. So there is no contradiction here.

Our philosopher parallels this with “the existence of the other as the most powerful being contradicts god as the most powerful being.” Again there is no contradiction. The other meets the definition of god and so is god.

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Finally the medieval philosopher concludes with “because of the contradiction when we assume god doesn’t exist, then god exists.”

Of course there is no contradiction. The philosopher assumed all along that god exists. He has been saying all along that “if god doesn’t exist then god exists.” If nothing meets the definition of god then some “other” meets the definition of god. It is not a “proof” of anything. Just a display of terrible misunderstanding about how language works.

But we can also show the nonsense in the medieval argument with another similar example, as below:

(1) Ray is the author of this book.

(2) But if Ray doesn’t really exist then someone else is the author of this book.

(3) But that existence of another contradicts Ray as the author of this book.

(4) So Ray must be the author of this book.

What? If you think this above argument makes sense then I have a nice used car to sell you.

This “reasoning” about a book’s author says nothing at all about who might be the author of the book. The only thing that can be concluded is that the author of the book is the author of the book. But, we can also note that the “argument” also sneakily uses “Ray” as a synonym for “author” but without telling us that fact.

The above proof of the medieval philosophers for existence of “god” does not demonstrate that a most powerful wine or a most powerful being (god), has to exist. It only demonstrates that arm-chair philosophers hundreds of years ago didn’t understand language the way we do today.

Unfortunately for them their result is just a lot of wasted brain power. You can't understand the universe just by sitting down and thinking about it, or by playing with words.

However, sometimes people, when faced with something they find indescribable, will automatically invent new words. Two hundred years ago the concept of a mobile cell phone was incomprehensible - in the language of the day and in the context of those times. But it is very comprehensible now: we can define such words with reference to present day context, with reference to other present day words, and in a way that makes it comparable to other concepts and open to verification.

Plus we know today that any word starts out as incomprehensible to others.

For example, if I eat an ice cream, it is my personal experience. I sense things in my way. The colors I see are not exactly the same as the colors you see. And the same applies to what I smell and taste. Your taste buds are slightly different than mine. Your brain is different than mine. Your prejudices and preconceptions influence what you think you sense.

You went through different experiences in your life than I did and interpret (and try to understand) the experience of eating ice cream by comparing it to your own past experiences, not to mine (which are private to me). All your past biases affect your judgment about what it is to eat ice cream, and what we mean by ice cream.

Nor can I describe to you exactly what I experienced while eating the ice cream. Perhaps I could say something like "it was good" or "I enjoyed it," but that gives you no details at all about what I experienced personally.

Because experiences are private to us personally (a result that was only recently formulated and was not part of the thinking

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processes of people 2000 years ago) all of my experiences are ineffable. I can't describe them to you as I really experience them.

So mystical experience, as private states of happiness or ecstasy or otherwise, contrary to what mystics maintain, is no more "ineffable" than any other experience in life.

But yet we do try to communicate our experiences to others.

This is because others can share our referents with similar things and events in their own private experiences. We see something. They see something. We both point to the same thing. We point at things like ice cream. We both say "ice cream." We point to our stomach and say, "tastes good," and we feel a sensation in our mouth. They remember a sensation in their mouth. We both associate the same sensation with a memory of when we last ate the thing we both call, "ice cream."

For the two of us the "vision" of ice cream is not exactly the same. But we share some common features – features that can also be verified by many others. And we all agree to associate our private experiences with the words "ice cream."

And, likewise, for the two of us the "taste" of ice cream is not exactly the same. But there are common features – also features that can be verified by a large number of others – that we both agree to call by the word "tasty."

The key to this is that we know there are common features that are shared by large numbers of others. It is just a practical, useful thing – to allow us to work together with others in a practical manner that doesn't result in chaos.

So, if we want to, we can skip all the nonsense about meditation and mystical experience being ineffable or hard to communicate to others. The "experience" of meditation is no more ineffable than any other experience in life, simply because it is just another "experience."

We just have to agree, for practical reasons, to describe experiences as best as we can using present day words. Or invent new words and get others to agree (for practical, useful purposes) to use the same words.

After all, in the past somebody did invent words like “tasty” and “ice cream” and people tried to figure out how, for practical purposes, these words formed relations between their private experiences and common shared experiences.

We can do the same for the “experience” or mental exercise (psychological exercise) of meditation, relating private experiences to common shared words.

If nobody has in the past thousands of years been able to list common properties to mystical experiences of ultimate reality then we have to wonder if there really is such a thing as any mystical experience of ultimate reality. Which would make sense if “ultimate reality” is just a nonsense phrase.

And, since words also express concepts, the same reasoning can be applied to the claims of mystics that meditation is un-conceptualizable (beyond the ability to express through concepts). Obviously this is untrue since “meditation” itself is a concept, and the ideas (or views) or theories of universal emptiness, illusion and a god nature are also concepts. It makes no sense to say that your concepts are unconceptualizable. It is like saying black is not blackable.

As an interesting aside we can mention that some Buddhist scholars (in Madhyamaka and in Yogacara schools) realized that there are problems with theories about cosmic emptiness, illusion, divine mind, essence, intrinsic nature of a thing, god and so on. But they thought that the problem was with the whole idea of meaning.

That is, they didn’t think that the only problem was with those particular words that were badly defined - words that have no



common basis to them which large numbers of people can verify and agree to. In fact, some of the Yogacara people, while criticizing other philosopher's meaningless notions like "essence" and "self in all things" also proposed their own meaningless notions like a "Buddha nature" or "Buddha consciousness" or a mind that is "originally pure" and then gets "defiled."

This of course begs us to ask: "how can anyone verify or check up on what we mean by original purity? We can speak of the origins of our tribe or the origins of our city but what does it mean to speak of the origins of a mind? It is again a case of words being used where they should not be used.

Or what do you mean by "pure" in reference to a mind? Can we check on 2 minds to decide if one is pure and another is not? How would we do that? What are the criteria for comparison? If you can list criteria for "pure minds" that can be checked (by large numbers of different people) then you have a good definition. If not you have a bad definition.

Yet when mystics jumble all the words together to come up with an "original pure mind" it sounds like a deep insight or revelation. But that is illusion. And mystical illusion is attractive and appealing and enticing. Or rather hypnotic. We really believe the nonsense jumble of words means something even though we can't quite explain to others what it would mean.

We can point at a rock and say, "that is rock." And other people can (subconsciously) list the criteria they think defines a rock and then check up on the object in front of them to see if it meets those criteria and should be called "rock." That is, check if they are, in fact, sharing the same common experience as other people.

But we can't give a list of properties for what we mean by "original pure mind." Try it, and you'll probably just get a list that repeats the words used, as in: "it must be pure, a mind, and original. But you won't have anything to use to check up on

whether you can verify or not that something you experience is, or is not, an “original pure mind.”

But mystics have gone even deeper with their fuzzy thinking. Deeper than misusing language and then attacking language as the real reason for their abused words being meaningless. They have gone off and attacked the idea of logic. They like to maintain that their jumbled words about "ultimates" are beyond the reach of logic.

Logic, the mystics pretend, is just not up to the job of deciphering the workings of the almighty "ultimates." But, again, there is nothing wrong with logic.

Nobody can make any logical conclusions when they start out with a badly defined concept like a "two headed one headed man." Likewise, nobody can make any logical conclusions when they start out with "ultimates." It is not the fault of logic. It is the fault of using bad definitions and meaningless jumbled words.

But mystics and metaphysical thinkers always try to place the blame elsewhere, so their followers won't easily catch onto the fact that they are mumbling nonsense.

To replace language, concept making and logic, which they deny, the mystics have had to invent new methods that supposedly can be used to verify the mystical teachings about their jumbled words. One of these is called meditation.

It is like saying that (of course) we can't directly perceive any "two-headed one-headed men" and we can't (of course) logically figure out what it could mean, but still, we can "suggest" what it may look like and by following the "suggestions" you could come to appreciate what it may be like. More nonsense. No amount of suggesting will allow you to understand badly defined concepts and jumbled words.

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However, the mystics argue (using bad logic) that since a man can approach a house and since a number can approach infinity, then, why not say we can have mystical methods to allow us to approach to "ultimate truth," to "suggest" what it may be like as we "approach" that final stage.

But the difference is that, infinity is well-defined, by comparison to other numbers, as the largest imaginable number, but nobody knows what is meant by infinite or highest truth. Do we compare it to other sorts of truth? What sorts of other truths are there? Is it the largest imaginable truth? Then what do you mean by large and small truth?

When we use language properly we immediately see a problem with the idea of the Buddhists, the idea of thinking that you can meditate to negate (empty) out **all**, that is **ALL** views. In fact we can empty out views only one at a time.

Buddhists can negate (empty out) views about god or about the soul, but they can't reach the "emptiest" condition of having emptied out all views, known and unknown. They can't ever reach "ultimateness" or "completeness" or "finality" in their meditation tasks. Infinity will prevent them. Just as it prevents scientists from reaching an "ultimate" knowledge of the laws of the universe.

We can use the idea of negation or emptiness to face and eliminate only some of our bad habits, instincts, tendencies and so on (even a tendency to depression) but we can't eliminate all and everything. There are limits.

And that suggests that perhaps we can't even eliminate many habits by trying to prove to ourselves that they are "empty" of real force, power or energy. Or that they are empty of real ultimate existence and are just local, animal urges local to our limited speck of a planet.

Can we just meditate and negate away two million years of evolved human animal instincts?

Or two billion years of the evolved instincts of life? Life, since the time of the first bacteria on earth, that is for 2 billion years, has been struggling to exist. In that long period life developed ways to adapt to the environment. They have developed behaviors that allow them to survive, behaviors that were useful for survival or they would have vanished long ago. Can we wipe out all of that in 30 years of meditation?

Negation or emptying doesn't seem to be an "all" powerful process that is up to the task of negating all of those useful survival instincts, let alone "all" views.

Maybe the solution is to incorporate all 4 of the above points of commonality between scientists and Buddhists into our view of life. Rewriting them we could say we should conduct our life so that:

(1) We negate unverified views and bad habits, desires and tendencies, if we can, or at least don't let them control us, Don't get overly attached to some view. Even if we can't eliminate it from our life.

(2) We realize that nothing is permanent, ultimate, final, static and complete, so there is hope for progress in riding ourselves of tendencies and habits,

(3) We remain open-minded, always exploring, always looking,

(4) We realize that truth is local and that we can do many things not for some "ultimate" purpose or because it is part of some higher plan or truth, but just for the fun of it or for its local value in keeping us happy and out of conflict with those around us.

Of course, the above 4 points imply that we have a mind – the tool or "medicine" that can follow the above 4 steps and negate our way to a better understanding of what theories are and are not useful in our local context.

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This would seem to “negate” the Buddhist idea that we should also negate our mind, or at least the process of forming concepts and ideas. We need mental power to perform the above 4 steps.

The Hindu swamis classify people into 3 groups: those who use their mental abilities to explore and discover (satwics), those who use their mental powers to earn a daily living (rajics) and those who refuse to use their mental powers (tamasics).

Tamasics engage in activities that squash mental activity: sleeping, drugging themselves senseless, drinking, suicide (stopping the mind and thoughts forever), and depression (seeing only emptiness and hopelessness and refusing to use the mind to find solutions to problems).

Obtaining a final state of “no mind,” having emptied out even the task of emptying, it would seem that you would have then reached a true tamasic state.

But tamasic people just lie there inert and do nothing. It is hard to believe that a tamasic person could help themselves. It is harder to believe that someone in depression could negate away depression or emptiness by applying more emptiness. It is even harder yet to believe that one could change from tamasic to satwic by negation (step 1 above) without the other 3 activities listed above.

It is the last 3 steps that have a “hopeful” or “positive thinking” flavor to them to oppose the negative activity of step 1. It would seem that the last 3 steps are vital to lifting anyone out of depression, out of an over-preoccupation with negation. The last 3 steps are ones that really engage are mental powers. Explorers and scientists are usually excited about what lays ahead and not depressed.

In fact without mental abilities (if you emptied them all out) one couldn’t even negate any more – and so could never even get

close to the final step where we negate “all.” Or where we negate the process of negating.

So at the very least, even if we didn’t follow the last 3 steps, we would have to be sure we didn’t really negate (empty out) our mental abilities.

Nor, apparently, can we empty out our compassion for others. Buddhists believe that compassion is one of the most important virtues. And how could a mindless person be compassionate?

By comparison with the value in using our mind (mindfulness) and the value of compassion, no Buddhist has ever clearly stated the value of gaining a final total emptiness, the nonsensical limit of the total negation of all.

It is easy to see the value of negation, or emptying meditation, as a local process – stopping particular negative thoughts, emotions, bad habits, tendencies, and ways of think, that only bring you suffering as you exist locally in some time at some place and in some context and culture.

But, by comparison, it is hard to see the value of ultimate negation. What comes from having no views about anything? What would be the value in eliminating all, that is each and every, thing in your mind? Or the value in “ultimately” eliminating the mind?

It seems like extremism to suggest that to end suffering one has to kill the mind.

In fact, without a mind (negated away) you can not even know if you have achieved the final step of negating every value and view. If you can’t know about it when you have achieved the final goal then you might as well just take the immediate tamasic step to ending suffering– suicide or drugs. Or just curl up and go to sleep.

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Furthermore, when we say we are “conscious” we mean “conscious of.” That is, we are never just conscious but “conscious of.” For example we are “conscious of the sun” or “conscious of our hand” or “conscious of our friend” or “conscious of our consciousness.” So, to verify if you have “meditated properly” you must be “conscious of emptiness,” and that is nonsense. Just as we can only be conscious of some thing so we can only be conscious of the “absence of” some particular thing.

We can be “conscious of the absence of the sun” or “conscious of the absence of our friend.” But we can’t be conscious of pure nothing – since the mind doesn’t work that way. The most you can achieve is being “conscious of the absence of thoughts and feelings.” That is, you would be “aware” of the absence of the thoughts and emotions, or maybe aware of your awareness in the absence of thoughts and emotions. But you are not achieving complete, final or ultimate “emptiness” in deep meditation.

Your mind is still working. Your mind is still discriminating between things – such as discriminating the “absence” of thoughts from the “presence” of thoughts, or discriminating the presence of “consciousness” from thoughts or the silence and quiet.

Or maybe you are just discriminating the difference between your consciousness and emptiness (absence of anything). Or discriminating the lack of “self” in nature. But you are definitely discriminating. Your mind is working when meditating.

Nor can we say we have reached something beyond concepts – unconceptualizable. That could only occur as a complete shut down of the mind – tamasic collapse and extinction.

The mind has to be there to discriminate and experience. Without the mind we can’t experience. At most it would be like we were in deep sleep- conscious of nothing (un-conscious).

Nor would the memory be there if you negate the view that you have a memory. And that means that even after a return from meditation (wake up if you will) we would never remember the ultimate truth.

So Buddhist meditation can provide no proof of concepts involving ultimates like “ultimate reality” or “highest truth.”

That then begs the question: how can mystics say they are firmly convinced of an “ultimate reality” or “highest truth” if they have no memory of such concepts after meditation. They could only say that nothing happened during meditation. So on what basis can they claim that their meditation brought them anything? Except perhaps a good “tamasic” sleep.

On the other hand, anything they did remember about their meditation would not be “ultimate reality” but far from it. An experience is mundane, worldly activity and not ultimate or transcendent. And they can never use such finite experiences to justify the existence of the infinite or transcendent.

So the Buddhist meditation methods (after they have trashed language and logic) are quite incapable of providing any backup support for their views. And that is to be expected since there should be no way to confirm meaningless concepts made of jumbled words. Meditation cannot help you to access impossibly defined ideas

Even someone with a highly developed mind, as was attributed to Buddha, cannot reach to infinity and demonstrate such a theory as that of a “higher truth.” He could never say that meditation on emptying out views would bring you to ultimate truth. Neither he nor any other Buddhist could ever gather evidence for such a theory. That is why, during his life, he only spoke of developing compassion and ending suffering and refused to comment on any other usage for meditation.



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Unfortunately most mystics are not as smart as he was. They think meditation proves something about nothing and verifies the truth of a set of empty, jumbled words without meaning.

Of course a few mystics won't ever give up their nonsense ideas. They want us to believe that ultimate or transcendent things are, by definition, beyond the power of the mind to fathom. Incomprehensible. Unknowable. Un-conceptualizable.

Well, of course they are. They were defined to be that way. That is, defined to refer to nonsense and nonsense, like "one-headed two headed men" are beyond the power of the mind to fathom.

But there is one last resort of the mystics in their fruitless efforts to defend their use of "ultimate realities" and "highest truths." They propose that they have one more method to know about transcendental ideas that is similar to meditation. They refer to this non-mind, non-conceptual way as "intuition," or sometimes as "divine revelation."

A lot of people explain intuition by saying they just "feel" that certain things are true. They call it a "gut" reaction. But that probably means it occurred at the level of the lower, animal mind where perceptions often occur as feelings and sensations and urges instead of as the thoughts of the upper, conscious mind. If that is the case, then intuition would be just another way the body has for acquiring knowledge.

So we have to ask, what tells you that such knowledge gained by intuition or revelation is coming from an "ultimate reality" instead of just the lower brain areas? There doesn't seem to be any way to tell the difference. Even people who believe in leprechauns feel a sense of "certainty" about the revelations they receive about leprechauns.

So why would we believe that intuitions and revelations don't come from the simplest source, our own brain, but instead from a

unproven, hypothetical structure like god or “ultimate reality” that isn’t even a proper concept, but just an almost random jumble of words?

Perhaps this is why the Buddhist school of Yogacara proposes that faith is the basis of all their teachings – like that of a Buddha Nature as the reality behind all things. There is no way to prove such ideas – by any method - you just have to believe it on faith. And ask, “how did the first believer ever come up with such an idea?” The only answer is he invented it.

Humans easily trick themselves into believing, mistakenly, that there are ultimate principles like god, nothingness, (or oneness) and illusion behind the world and claim then that they experience the effects of these “ultimates” when they usually are just experiencing the effects of other things in the world (dependent origination).

It is like the hero of Charles Dickens’ story *Great Expectations* who imagined for years that he was supported by a wealthy old lady when in fact his benefactor was a convict. Thus someone who gets a promotion at work might claim it is the effect of god working in their life, though they have no proof of such a thing, nor even any way to “ever” prove such a thing. Yet, all the while the real, unacknowledged “benefactor” is another person (dependent origination) like a boss who took a liking to them.

Humans want to believe so badly in ultimates that even when you show them how some event actually happened, or how some person actually did something that helped them, most people still refuse to accept it and claim their (unprovable) ultimate force somehow, in some way, influenced the other person to act as they did. They are thus living their own Great Expectations. They want to believe, or maybe need to believe, that meditation and prayer will get them the impossible.

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The Buddhist two truths doctrine, in claiming there is an ultimate truth, is just a misguided effort to provide a reason for meditation – that one meditates to ultimately empty out “all” views.

What they should have said is that nobody is perfect. Nobody is free of prejudice and preconceptions about life, others and the universe. Nobody needs only a few “adjustments” to their character. And so nobody can stop and say they have had enough meditation since they have finally perfected their personality.

Such a description gives a valid reason for continuing meditation without having to resort to fictions like that of an ultimate reality or highest truth.

And such an idea fits in nicely with our 4 points of common operation between Buddhists and scientists.

While before we said that in our search for useful truths about the universe we have an endless journey in front of us, never being able to accept any theory as static, ultimate truth, now we can add to it that, in “reforming” ourselves out of suffering by Buddhist negation of views and values, we also face an endless journey, never having the luxury of saying we have finally reached perfection.

If you ask a child why he is playing you will likely get a blank stare as an answer. There is no ultimate purpose to playing. So, likewise, there is no ultimate purpose to meditation, even the meditation to empty or negate views. You just meditate to ease tension and stress and rid your self of ideas that can cause you to suffer. Or, you could say that it is just be a way to have fun, or perhaps analyze some particular views and prove to yourself that they have no value to them.

This is perhaps why the later Mahayana Buddhists looked at the original, Hinayana Buddhist, methods and concluded that it was worthless to try and achieve nirvana (snuffing out of it all). It

would be better to just concentrate on living while eliminating as much suffering as you can and showing compassion to others.

“The victorious ones said that emptiness is the remedy for *all* views. But there is no remedy for those who hold onto the view of emptiness.” Madhyamaka Karika, XIII,8

The above quote can mean that emptying out, negating, is a way to cure ourselves of, or eliminate, any one particular view, like the view that we are afraid or depressed. It works individually for them *all*. But though we can eliminate all individual views (meaning any particular one of them all), we can not eliminate them “all” as a group.

As we said earlier, you can count out any one particular number, but you can never count them all in sequence all the way to infinity. It would be foolish to expect that. So it is correct to say we can eliminate any view but there would be no remedy for a person who thought they could eliminate all views, simply because there are an infinity of possible views.

But, in fact we can ask: do we really even want to empty out everything in us – especially if it is not causing us any suffering? Shouldn’t we just do meditation on views that bring suffering to us?

In that sense, meditation to negate or empty out local (your) negative emotions is just a therapy, like any other therapy. We can then measure its effectiveness, as we can measure the effectiveness of any therapy. And, since the original Buddhist goal was the “elimination of suffering” we can measure the effectiveness of meditation by looking at how well it helps people deal with their suffering.

The basic Buddhist meditation for emptying out a suffering-inducing emotion like anxiety the Buddhist meditation is to have us

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meditate on our anxiety, and discover that there is nothing real to it. Thus there is nothing to be destroyed or removed. We simply realize our anxiety (or depression or fear) is a nothing. As a nothing, it is powerless. A mirage.

Thus you are only deluding yourself by imagining that the emotion has some sort of control over you. So think of the emotion as empty. With no real life or energy of its own.

Yet most people cannot do that. We feel our anxiety and depression as a strong force that drives relentlessly on within us. We can no more imagine it as powerless than we can imagine a tiger or a hurricane as powerless, as a nothing. But, if you can, then good for you. You can have success with this emptying out or negating method. Just as a realization of the dangers of smoking helps "some" people rid themselves of the habit, so a realization of the emptiness of anxiety and depression could help some people negate the habit away.

But others will have to go deeper. Emptiness simply means the emotion has no self-made power. It didn't originate by itself. Other factors around us, social factors, environmental factors, diet, nutrition or lack of it, family relations and early childhood exposure to toxic substances and toxic people all contributed to the originating of the fear, anxiety, depression, addiction or anger. And the emotion doesn't keep on going by itself, on some sort of self-sufficiency or self-powering method. So Buddhists consider the emotions "empty" in that sense: they are not self-made, are not self-sufficient and are not self-energizing.

What that means is that the depression or anxiety or fear is the result of dependent origination or dependent arising. It is part of a web or network of forces. The whole web of inter-related factors is responsible for the creation of that emotion that torments you today.

So, if nothing else (even if it doesn't help you rid yourself of the emotion) this idea can ease the self-guilt you might feel about the emotion.

You can say to yourself that, just as the wind or rain storm is not part of you, so the depression or addiction or anger is not part of you. The hurricane started as a result of thousands of factors all acting on each other. And the depression or fear or anxiety started as a result of thousands of factors. So you have nothing to feel guilty about. You didn't start it. SO don't feel guilty that you are responsible for the depression or anxiety or addiction. You aren't continuing it. So don't feel guilty that you are somehow continuing the depression and anxiety and so on.

In other words, empty out (negate) the view that you are responsible for the emotions that torment you. Take the pressure off yourself.

And since the emotions, feelings, tendencies, urges, desires and habits came from a web of thousands of factors you certainly can't destroy them, stop them prevent them any more than you can destroy a hurricane, stop a hurricane or prevent a hurricane from occurring.

And it isn't just present factors in your society, family, friends, diet, nutrition and so on, that exist around you at the present moment that are bringing on the feelings in you. There are also factors that started in the past. Some of them are instincts that have developed with the animals over millions of years. You cannot cause the extinction of passions and animal urges. Fear is an instinct that developed for its survival value in animals and you just cannot chase it off.

So empty out the view that you can somehow face down the depression or anxiety or addiction or fear and chase it away or knock it out or drive it away. Empty out that view.

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The most you can do with a hurricane is enjoy it, watch it, witness it or perhaps just be indifferent to it. If the wind is howling and trees are swaying then become indifferent to it, since it is beyond your control - is the result of dependent origination. So relax and just be indifferent to it.

And likewise the most you can do with a depression or anger or addiction or anxiety is watch it. Let the emotion holler. Let the anxiety twist your insides. Just be indifferent to it. It comes as the result of thousands of factors in a giant web that is so large you couldn't even start to count how each factor affects the other to originate the emotion in you. (You even have trillions of nerve cells in your brain that are in a web of their own, interacting with each other, to help produce the emotion in you. How can you even try to discover which ones of them started up the nasty thoughts and emotions you now experience? All you can do is be indifferent to them.

How the hurricane started is irrelevant to someone standing in the middle of a storm. How anger and hatred comes and goes is irrelevant to someone standing in the middle of the cyclone of emotions. So don't try to analyze and discover the origins of your emotional storms. Leave it alone. Just be indifferent to the storm.

Be unattached. Let the emotions rant and rave and think of it as a film that you didn't produce or direct. It was made elsewhere and involved hundreds of players, editors and technicians. You are just in the audience viewing the final finished film. So don't take the film seriously. It doesn't matter if it's called "attack of the zombies" or "depression again" or "get that drug" or "Star ship." It is the result of many factors and you are only there to watch something you had no control in making.

However for some people this attitude of indifference may not be enough. After all you can empty out the view that you caused the emotion. You can empty out the view that you "have" to be

involved with the emotions and thoughts. But you can't empty out the view that it might hurt you.

You can be indifferent to a hurricane and just watch it, but that hurricane may still take away your house.

You can be indifferent to an inner feeling or emotion and tell yourself that it is outside your control, and originated in a vast web of thousands of social and environmental factors and brain cell firings, but that web can still affect you, just as a hurricane could.

Unfortunately, the concept of our belonging to a vast web of dependencies and inter-relations, with all our views, emotions and thoughts coming from that web, (instead of from something called an "I" a "me" a soul), doesn't imply that the web is powerless.

If you say there is no soul that is self-sufficient and self-powered, it doesn't mean that there is no power in the whole universe. You, as a self, might be empty of power of your own to cause your own suffering, but that doesn't imply that the web won't inflict suffering on you.

So, it doesn't seem to help to say that depression or anxiety is empty of self-nature, empty of power to keep itself going. Nor does it help to say that it was a web of countless thousands of factors that keeps it going. The fact is the emotional storm is there now, in full power, and going full force. It is hurting you whether or not you empty it out of real self-existence. Webs can hurt as much as single things can.

We can conclude that it seems that the Buddhist method of emptying (negating) views is not a fail-safe therapy. We can't expect it to always work and always end suffering for us.

Looking at the fate of some "negation" ads in the media, such as the anti-cigarette ads popular in the West, would tell us that



negation by itself is not enough. For decades governments have been telling the public not to smoke cigarettes. They have tried to show that it is not “cool” and does not make you popular or relieve stress. It is nothing except a health hazard. Yet people still smoke cigarettes. Lise's brother knew all about how cigarette smoke could bring lung cancer, heart problems, emphysema and a host of other illnesses and still he said, "I don't want to quit smoking. I like smoking." Negation by itself didn't convince him to give up his habit.

It is thus hard to see how the Buddhist method of emptying out or negating views must bring good results. This is probably in agreement with other psychological therapies which are only sometimes effective.

Unlike what the Buddhist masters tell us, emptying or negating views does not seem to save you from suffering. Nor is it easy to understand how or why that would be the case. In a universe where dependent arising takes place, that is, where events depend on relations with thousands of other events past and present, it is hard to imagine that any one view of any one person would have much effect on the whole web or, on its own, cause someone to really relinquish some view, habit, behavior or theory.

Plus we could ask if it is even possible to ever end suffering. For example consider the case of a rabbit chased by a coyote. If the coyote catches and kills the rabbit, the rabbit suffers pain and death, but the coyote is happy and eats and lives. If the coyote misses the rabbit the coyote suffers hunger and starves while the rabbit is happy and lives. One way or the other, one of them will suffer. The only way to stop all suffering is to end the life of them both. Is that the true Buddhist way then? To lead us to the extinction of life?

Perhaps we should empty out the whole Buddhist idea of emptiness and ending suffering. Or at least modify it to include all the four steps above.

After giving up Vedanta we endured a depressing feeling of emptiness for a long time. But when we studied Buddhism we found that emptiness was perhaps the natural result obtained by anyone who explored the universe free of bias and prejudice. We decided to enjoy the emptiness and relish the idea of emptying out (negating) views – after all that was what we had been doing all along as we explored and then rejected one philosophy after another.

It was only when we analyzed Buddhism itself in greater detail that we realized that negation was not all there was to science and Buddhism. We really had to lift ourselves out of living in emptiness. We had to go beyond just the idea of emptying or negating theories and habits and tendencies in us and on to using all four of the principles listed above.

And item (4) especially says we have to keep looking at all and anything in life. The search for truth will be an endless search and not take us to some final resting place of static, ultimate truth but to a dynamic, ever-changing sequence of local truth. That is, to practical or pragmatic truths. But if that is the case, if we will only ever find local truth that can be applied to our life as it is in the present moment then we also have to learn to enjoy the moment.

The opposite coin face to “ending suffering” is to find happiness. Local truth that tells us how to enjoy life, make it productive and be happy is then all that we should expect. If that is the case then, even more so, we have to above all else just try to be happy.

If we meditate, then fine. But it is not an obligation. It is just one more avenue that we can use to discover happiness.

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In fact our journey has now changed. We no longer are just in search of truth. We are in search of knowledge and momentary happiness.



## **Chapter 6. Old age, every moment counts**

There comes a time in life when we realize that we won't be here on this earth forever. We could be dead in a few years. After all, nothing is permanent.

While we were young we could play and act as if we had lots of time on our hands but when we are old we feel that every moment should be savored. Every moment should be relished.

Because of that we found that we were becoming impatient with thinkers who seemed to be wasting our time. One swami came in from India and gave a talk that showed he thought he was the ultimate authority on yoga and that nobody should dare question him. We left. We don't have time to listen to such nonsense. We can probably count the number of years left to us with our fingers and we won't (we refuse to) waste those precious years listening to nonsense. Another Hindu swami came in to teach about meditation but the fat old fellow just sat at the front of the lecture hall and slept. (We were supposed to keep our eyes closed, probably so we wouldn't see that), His followers informed us that he was psychically teaching us how to meditate. Ray walked out after 5 minutes but the swami slept on for two hours, followed by an hour of hymn chanting. Given the fact that

the year only has 365 days in it he preferred to spend the precious time outside in the fresh air and sunshine where he could think on the fragile nature of life. We won't ever go back to those fellows.

Time is of the essence when you grow old. Every moment is valuable. Every moment could be the last moment of your life – and do you want to waste those last moments?

Some Buddhists think that emptying (negating) ourselves of views is the most important teaching of Buddhism, while others think it is the four truths (suffering and the way to stop it), or compassion, or concentration, or nirvana. We think the most important teaching is that about impermanence and the momentariness of life. That life should be lived in the present moment, in the now.

Some people spend their time in regret about the past. Their thoughts are about what they should have done or what might have been the result if they had done one thing instead of another. But, yet, you cannot change the past. You can think about the past all you want and it will achieve nothing. You will never be able to change what has happened. It is a waste of time to think about what you might have done differently. It is a drain of energy to relive the past. It opens you up to despair, depression and other negative emotions.

With only a few years left to life, do you want to spend them in depression or fear or anger? Do you really want to live out your last few years on earth in such a state? So don't do it. Forget about the past.

Life is too precious to waste. Life is too impermanent. Spend it enjoying the present moment.

Or, if you can't help yourself but to think about the past, then keep an alarm clock going to wake you from your revelry. Or set a timer that beeps every 2 minutes to wake you up. Have a tape recorder handy with a message that blares out at you, "wake up,

get into the here and now, the present moment.” Or write that message on paper and put it on the wall of your room, or on the refrigerator. Don’t waste the present moment. Don’t waste your limited, very limited, time on earth. Be impatient with such nonsense from your mind about your past.

And in the present be very, very selective with what you read, what you watch on television or at the movies, what conversations you have, who you associate with and what you do. You cannot afford to waste precious time.

We do not meditate, visualize or pray as much as we used to. Primarily because, after realizing that it is just a (wonderful) therapy, we decided that we don’t need to do therapy everyday, just as someone with psychological problems would not go to visit their counselor or psychotherapist every day. We are impatient with the idea of wasting the remaining years of our life in fruitless activity.

If we would regret the past, which we shouldn’t, we would also regret all the time we wasted in the past meditating or listening to fools giving lectures. Swami Chinmayananda once told us to watch out for charlatans pretending to speak on profound truths. His joking words were, “the longer the beard the more you have to watch out.” Now we know how to be impatient with such lectures. And how to be impatient with meditation.

We have no time to waste on such people. We guard our time. We honor and respect the value of the present moment and the limited number of future moments in the impermanent life ahead of us.

This probably puzzles a few people. For example it puzzles one of our neighbors who has tried vainly to get us to spend some time discussing christian beliefs with him. He is in fact a protestant minister and has repeatedly invited us to his church and even dropped bibles at our house. We always refuse his invitations and

he wonders why he can't get us to come over to his house and talk with him about his beliefs.

All he wants is for us to talk with him. This is because, as long as we talk to him, and express our doubts and disagreements with him, he can entertain the hope of converting us. But, if we don't join into an argument with him then he has no hope at all of convincing us that he is right in his belief. That is, you can only convince someone who is willing to listen to you.

However, in acting that way to him - refusing to listen to him - we are only giving him a taste of his own medicine. We know that you can never convince a born-again evangelist christian minister of anything - he is never willing to listen to you. With him it is a one way street - he wants a chance to convince us while never allowing us the chance to convince him.

Another way to look at it is to say that this minister imagines that religious questions can be settled on the basis of who is the better debater. He wants us to raise some doubt so that he can argue that we are wrong.

The average person would be totally unprepared for such "debates." They were likely born into a god-based religion, and just have some wishy-washy doubts but have never actually studied their childhood religion in a critical way. So the remnants of childhood beliefs in an angry, jealous, revengeful god and eternal hell fire are likely still with them, even if deep in their subconscious mind. A crafty minister can prey on them easily and toss fear, doubt and anger at them. He just has to say things like, "what if you are wrong and there is a god and he is a horrible revengeful beast and you end up in hell. Do you want to take that chance?"

Well, we don't avoid meeting with him out of fear of falling for that sort of crap but only because we don't want to suffer through such an assault of nonsense. We certainly wouldn't go



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and sit on an anthill for fun and so we also wouldn't go and place ourselves in the presence of someone who wants to bombard us with threats or try to rouse mortal fear in us.

Of course the ant bites or hell-mongering statements of ministers wouldn't really bother us - we would just concentrate on other things while on the anthill or in the church.

But the main reason for refusing to allow this minister neighbor to assault us with his beliefs is that we are old and impatient and we don't want to waste the precious few remaining moments of our life.

But, besides restricting ourselves from reflecting dangerously on the past, or wasting the present moment with nonsense, we also now guard our selves from worrying about the future.

When we were younger we were told to set goals. We planned out our life. We decided to get a university degree, enter a certain type of career, build a business (and have it producing cash by such and such a time), get and payoff a mortgage on a house by a certain date and store away enough funds so that we could retire by some specific age. And we set smaller goals as well: where and when we would take vacations, when we would finish writing a book, when we would finish reading some book, when we would cut the lawn, what we would eat for dinner, when we would go to the theater, when we would go to a ball game. And the list goes on and on.

But as we get older two things start to happen. First, knowing that we will likely be dead in a few years anyway, we no longer have as much relish for future goals. That doesn't mean that we don't still have some but they are usually not long term goals or entered into with as much enthusiasm as we did when we were younger. And, second, we see many of our old accomplishments crumbling away.

We struggled and fought and worked hard for years to get a home and suddenly we realize we will have to give up the house that made us happy for so many years and go into a nursing home. Or, we see that we can no longer manage the business we used to put so much energy into. If we are lucky we can sell it off, or give it to a relative but usually we just abandon it. And even if we sell our business, or factory, to someone else we often see that person running our cherished enterprise into the ground. And a similar fate lies in store for those who worked long hours for years to build up their professional status. Now they see it has to end. They have to give up their career, their job.

In all parts of life there are no ultimate goals, only temporary goals. And that is because we don't live forever. For example we just met a man who used to be an engineer. He worked hard all his life but now he is blind, nearly deaf and, when we saw him last, his body was twisted to the left side. He had slaved away at his profession for years only to be forced, by nature, to give up his cherished activities. But a more famous example is that of the Canadian politician who labored for years, rose to the head of his political party, became opposition leader in the house and was ready to ace the next election with a probable landslide win and become prime minister - until he got cancer and died.

These examples seem to indicate that it is useless to plan for the future, and many mystics interpret it in just that way. They tell us it is silly to plan for the future. And their devoted disciples also shake their heads over the "obvious" logic of it and agree that all the goal-setting activity of our earlier life was probably not really worth it after all.

Others, though, remind us that the problem is not with setting future goals. We can set goals - but we just should not get overly attached to those goals. Don't get depressed when you can't achieve your goals, or when your achievement disintegrates away to nothing, as it will one day.

So after you plan for the future we always have to forget about the future and get back to the present moment. The present moment is actually where we perform any and all actions that would help us reach those future goals. In fact if you spent too much time planning for and worrying about the future you would not have the focus you need to do the actions that have to be done now in order to reach those future goals. Imagine sitting there all day contemplating the steps needed to get a university degree and never taking the time out to study for the "present" examinations. You always need to concentrate on the present moment after you set future goals.

And forget about the ultimate futility of future goals. That will likewise get you nothing. The secret is just to enjoy the present moment and enjoy doing things in the now - especially those present actions that will help you get to your future goals.

Ultimately everything disintegrates and if you wait for the future to enjoy your life you may find, that when you are older, you are not capable of enjoying the fruits of all your labors. When you are crippled, sick, blind you may even find it bitter to look at your achievements and realize that you can no longer enjoy it. So that is all the more reason to enjoy the present moment and spend only the minimum of time on the future.

And the same logic applies to our mental achievements in life. We managed throughout our life to accumulate much wisdom, knowledge and experience and for what? That lifetime of collected expertise is now fading away as you age. And hopefully you won't end up with dementia. Our mind wears out just as our body wears out, just as an automobile or any tool will wear out or break, and we cannot do what we once did. We seem to end up, after years of struggle, right back where we started - with nothing. So don't wait to enjoy your life. Do in now in the present moment. In the here and now.

Of course some older people still plan out their future as if they thought they would live another 200 years. And most older people often lapse into hours of reminiscing about the past. A little bit of focusing on the future and past may be useful - we have to plan where we want to go and we have to remember the methods we used in the past to achieve results. But we should not spend too much of our precious time on the future and the past.

But, even those who know that the present moment should be the focus of their mental activity, still often do not guard their precious present moment securely, but waste their time with worry, anger and fear.

Luckily, after seeing how the present moment is emphasized by Buddhists (as mindfulness) we decided that this was wise counsel.

We took seriously the Buddhist theory (also common to Vedanta) of refusing to waste time (uselessly, since we can't alter the past) with regrets for the past, worries about the future, and concentrate (become mindful of) on the present moment. But we added to it the condition that we would jealously guard how we used even the precious present moment.

In fact, in life, we really do live only in the present moment. The past is gone forever and "exists" only in our memories. The future has not happened yet and "exists" only as the potential success of our planning. All that we really have is the present moment, the "now."

However, a few centuries ago some philosophers thought that we didn't really have the present moment either. They did this by applying the idea of "ultimates" to time, as they had to god, soul and cosmic reality. But this time the "ultimate" was the ultimately small, called an infinitesimal.

Their logic used the idea of repeated dividing. Let's say you imagine you "exist" in the present moment, where we consider

that "moment" as an interval that goes from 10:30 AM, and 1 second and 10:30 AM and 2 seconds. Well, someone might come along and say, "that's not a moment, it's too long. You've brought in some of the past and some of the future. A moment doesn't last that long."

So they say we must divide that second down. Instead of saying your "moment" was from 1 second after 10:30 until 2 seconds after 10:30 we'll use the interval that goes from 1.1 seconds to 1.2 seconds. That's a real "present" moment, a "now," since 1.05 seconds is already gone. It's in the past, and 1.25 is still in the future.

But then someone else says, "that's not small enough either." And they divide the "present" into the time from 1.0001 seconds to 1.0002 seconds after 10:30 AM.

Well you can go on like this forever, getting to smaller and smaller intervals of time - to exclude the past and the future. Eventually the real present moment would be an infinitesimally small interval. Time is then really mostly the past and future while the only present moment is an infinitely thin (thinner than anything imaginable) period of time - hardly existing at all. Of course that means there really is no present moment at all except as an "ultimate concept."

Now we have a problem - the past is gone, the future hasn't appeared yet and the "present moment" is on an infinitely thin slice of time, sitting between past and present. It is hard to grasp such an idea. It makes us wonder if there even is such a thing as time. And, of course, that led several Buddhists to the conclusion that existence is really empty.

But you can't jump to one unjustified conclusion (no existence) by using another unjustified conclusion (present time is an infinitely thin slice). This idea of the "present moment" as an infinitely thin slice of time is just another use by philosophers of concepts that can't be verified. So it is on a par with other con-

cepts like god, soul and Buddha nature. It is just another "ultimate," which as we discussed earlier comes only from imagination.

Luckily scientists have come up with other theories about time. Quantum physics, for example, proposed that you can't go on down to infinitely small intervals - neither in space nor in time. There is a fixed, finite interval - although very small. So any "present moment" is of a finite length of time and is not an sort-of 'non-existing" point between past and future. So there can be a real "present moment" or "now" moment.

As well, other scientists have reasoned that it takes a certain amount of time for something we see to affect the eye retina cells and generate a nerve impulse, and then more time for the nerve impulse to travel to the brain, more time for the impulse to travel around from one brain area to another, and even more time again for the circulating nerve pulses to change brain circuits and get registered as perception for our consciousness. One effect of this is that we are always living in the past. We are not experienced light hitting the eye right now, but the light that hit the eye a few milliseconds ago.

Plus the whole chain of events, from eye to memory, endure for a while (they don't last for an ultimately thin length of time but for some finite time) and we are aware of them during that interval of endurance. We are not talking about great lengths of time - for example the millions of years that a rock might endure - but milliseconds of endurance.

We can conclude that we can speak of living in the present moment. Our "present moment" is of a fixed length (long enough for us to actually "exist" in it ) and represents a sampling of the immediate past of the world outside us.

In the same way our "thoughts" seem to be "enduring" in the brain circuits for a finite time interval. And scientists have shown

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that certain brain areas "light up in MRI machines" before we consciously become aware of the thoughts. So the "present moment" of a thought is also something that lasts for a finite interval of time and represents the immediate past of our brain condition.

We could say that just as a rock endures for some fixed time so we have something called a "present moment" that is a finite time interval that endures.

Once more we don't have to deal with "ultimates" in order to describe life and existence.

But, more importantly, just as the definition of a mountain, or a house, or a goat involves the implied condition that it is some thing that "endures" for a period, so we can also define our mind or self in terms of it being some thing that endures. In that sense our mind is as real as a mountain or a house or a goat.

In fact, when we get right down to it any existing thing is said to exist because it endures for some finite time. That means it is a memory since a memory (taking the idea of E. De Bono) is just something that endures. Scratch a line on the wall and you've made a "record" or a memory of the action of scratching. Magnetize a piece of a hard disk and you've made a memory of the magnetizing action (and as well we interpret it as data). Alter chemicals in brain cells and we have a memory.

Being in the present moment is then just being in a shorter, more recent memory.

Some people like to recall all their past memories, even memories from decades ago. Older people replay events of their youth. It is as if they want to keep the events alive since it reinvigorates their memory. It helps them keep their sense of identity, of who they are.

If you ask someone, "Who are you?" they will try to answer that by calling up and looking at their memories.

We, that is our self, is just a memory - an enduring set of records of past events.

Living in the present moment then just means limiting the set of memories of who we are to just the most recent few milliseconds.

So why would we want to do that? Because it is useful. We have to consider that external events from decades ago that set up those decade old memories are probably long gone or unable to affect us now. Or at least there is lower probability of them affecting us now. But external events in the external world (as they hit our local area of space and time) that affected us a few milliseconds ago have a good probability of affecting us in the next few milliseconds as well. We should then put our attention to the areas that have greatest probability of affecting us now - to events of the present moment.

Living in the present moment, rather than the dead past of long ago, is then simply a matter of practicality.

But, saying it is practical means we realize that there are events external to us which can affect us, and that the world is changing and impermanent.

That means that the world has both endurance/ memory/ sense of identity and impermanence/perpetual change.

A mountain is perpetually changing as it gets eroded by water and wind and cold and yet it also endures for millions of years (lasts as a memory), and has an identity - which is why we can say "that mountain" as opposed to another mountain.

Likewise a house is always changing through wear and tear and renovation and repair and yet it endures for decades and has an identity - we say our house or that house because of certain common features that have endured.



In the same way our human body changes. Millions of cells die every second or get eaten by invading bacteria and are replaced by other new cells. You have a completely new body every seven years. And yet we recognize the identity of one body compared to another. For example Ray has a scab on a finger that persists despite the fact that cells of the skin slough off every month. The DNA memory molecule keeps the scab present among all the new cells. DNA is a relatively longer memory than a cell and so keeps the identity of the whole body going while cells come and go.

Likewise, our old memories fade and new memories, new experiences, replace them. We change the way we feel about things. We change our beliefs. Our personality gets altered by living. We are not mentally the same as we were just a few years ago. Our ideas change because of other people and other things around us. For example, we might have thought we were secure and then a tornado (or a flood, forest fire or a city expropriation) took away our home and we changed. We never feel secure again for the rest of our lives.

But at the same time we know that our mind, our sense of who we are (the memories that we use to identify our self, the list of special memories) endure for a little longer - perhaps for 70 to 90 years.

So change is an indisputable part of life. Everything is impermanent. But at the same time all things don't just last for an infinitesimally small, nonexistent time interval. Everything endures for a greater or smaller time interval, with a finite limit to how small the time of endurance (the memory) can be.

A mountain lasts longer than the rocks that are part of the mountain. And the chemicals in the rocks last longer than either the rocks or the mountain. A body lasts longer than the cells that make up that body. A mind lasts longer than the memories that make that mind.

But if memories fade then we have to wonder if our sense of self will also fade.

Scientific research has shown us that every time we recall a memory we change the details. That is, we alter our memories. So if we recall a memory of some horrible event and add details of happiness we eventually make the memory into a happy one. After that, being defined by our memories, we become a happy person.

So our memory is plastic. We should have expected that since even a scratch on a wall (a memory) can be ground off or painted over, erasing the memory of the scratching event. And any plastic memory can be molded into anything. This agrees with Buddhist ideas that everything, including memories are impermanent and constantly changing (the period of endurance can be shortened).

Instead of saying we are what we remember we should probably then change that to be you “become” what you remember.

A happy person is one with happy memories. A sad person is one with sad memories. A person in pain is one with painful memories.

The implication is that all the sad or depressed or angry person has to do is: recall the memories that make them sad, depressed or angry and then make minor adjustments to the memories. Use the imagination and apply it to the memory. Focus on something happy that (might have) occurred during the event (or invent a happy thing). Then enlarge the percentage of the memory that was devoted to the happy things. Go on recalling the memory many times every day for months and keep focusing on happy things within that memory.

Soon your memory will be telling you that it was a happy event after all, and not the original sad or frightening event you once thought it was. And then with happy memories you become, or rather are, a happy person.

So when we go beyond the present moment (memories of the last few seconds) and find ourselves recalling memories of the long ago dead past, recalling them into the present moment, realize that having them in the present moment gives you a great opportunity.

Most people, when past memories intrude into their present moment, fall victim to all the negative emotions and thoughts from that past. Most of the time that makes us miserable. We can see people lamenting about events that they lived through. They say, “If only I had done such and such,” or “why didn’t I do this or that?” They might as well be reading science fiction.

We saw someone sitting down at the edge of a lake, reading a fantasy novel. He was completely immersed in the imaginary world of the story. He lived the events, events he could do nothing about. It is pointless to think, “if I was there on Mars with Princess Xyli I would tell her to get out of there fast.” It is pointless and useless because it is an imaginary event. No matter how much you wish it, you can’t be on Mars.

People who like to relive their past are no different than that individual. You can’t go back and change your past. It is gone. In a sense it is no different than some story about living on the planet Mars. It is completely inaccessible.

It is equally pointless to call up your past memories and say something like, “I should have bought a car and taken my father to work, and then he wouldn’t have suffered in the cold.” It is pointless because you are living in a dream story. The past is dead. It is gone. Forever. You can’t get into it. You can’t open it up and change things to be different than the way they are.

To sit there regretting the past only helps make you miserable and depressed and full of regrets. It makes you suffer. It is like crying at a sad movie, or weeping as you read a novel.

Of course some people like to cry at movies and weep when they read sad novels and moan when they recall their memories of the past. But if you don't like crying at movies (or memories) then you can either shut them down or ... rewrite the script.

We now know today, thanks to science, that we can change our memories. You can rewrite the story of a novel. You can't get into the story and change it but you can rewrite it as a new story. So we can stop moaning and rewrite our past memories.

But to do that you have to first ask yourself, "who is in charge? The present you or the past you? The present moment memories or the dead past memories?"

When the past memories intrude into the delicate brief time of the present moment, they have acted recklessly. They are like fish out of water. They have come to a country where they have no power.

So it is not time to let those fragile upstarts take charge. They have come to your territory. Don't let them have the upper hand. You are in charge in the present moment, not them. Grab them and alter them forever. Slowly change the memories. Use what science tells us to your advantage.

Become the author not just the reader.

If you don't like a fantasy story that has lines about how "the Princess was knifed in the back" then you can cross them out and substitute, "I think the Princess on Mars looks behind her and sees the knife in time." So you can rewrite the story of your memories, cross out "I was scared, cold and miserable with bullets fling past me," and change it to "I think I was happy that day looking at the sunshine."

All you need is little changes. Otherwise you won't believe yourself. Your subconscious mind won't believe you.

Old age, every moment counts

Rewrite little things. Add in little bits of happiness or comedy into the tragedy of the past memory.

Then each time, add a little bit more. Let a lot of small changes accumulate. Slowly build the story.

Don't let the past memory dare to enter your present moment without risking its life. Without risking getting altered.

Forget about ultimates, fixed, permanent, unalterable concepts. Rewrite anything and everything that comes near you in your "sacred" present moment. There is no sense in being unhappy so make the present moment a time of happiness.

And since memories represent who you are, your sense of identity, that means you will rewrite yourself into a happy person. A better and more interesting main character for the (remembered) story of your life.

Be impatient and grouchy with sadness and depression and stupid memories that want to waste the precious, precious time of the present moment.



## **Chapter 7. The Body fades, filling the last moments**

It might be fine to say that in life we should just "enjoy the present moment" but that still leaves unanswered, to a large extent, the question of what we should do in that precious moment.

In once sense, of course, we could say that there is really nothing that absolutely "must" be done, since there are no verifiable existing things as "ultimates" and "absolutes." Humans just took the idea of local or relative superlatives (such as the "highest" mountain, locally on earth, and locally in the last million years) and falsely imagined that they could apply such superlatives unconditionally or absolutely (as in the "highest" mountain in all of existence). But they cannot. To do so only generates nonsense statements about unprovable ideas - we are unable to discover any "highest" mountain in existence.

So, in the same way, it is impossible for us to establish whether or not some particular action in life is absolutely significant, important, truthful or worth pursuing. There is nothing that absolutely "must" be done, except relatively to some local area in time and space - as when we might say that some life form must breath, now. Beyond its "immediate" survival there is nothing so special about any life form that allows us to say that it "must"

survive beyond its brief lifespan. It does not absolutely have to breathe and survive. It only breathes for a few moments in time.

Outside of some local context, whatever you do is as equally valid an action as any other. In the vastness of the universe a worm eating dirt is as valid an activity as a human constructing a skyscraper. They are both just manifestations of insignificant specks of life piling up resources, (minerals), in ways that seem significant (locally) to them at the time - but which the universe treats indifferently. In the universe a pile of earthworm castings and a pile of steel girders costing billions of earth dollars are as equally piddling and valueless.

As we get older, many people naturally tend to such an assessment of the world around them, and their own place in it. All the regular animal activities- sex, eating, playing, raising children, searching food or money and struggling to establish a home, and so on - that occupied most of their "precious moments" in the past, when they were younger, don't seem quite so attractive any more. Despite what dramatic films fantasize about, most older people just don't want to "be a teenager" once more," even if they had a younger body.

For example we have asked many people in their 90s, with assorted professional backgrounds, if they would like to "do it again," or go back to their earlier life. And the resounding answer is always: "no."

Of course. you may conclude that that is to be expected since, when our bones begin to ache and our muscles cramp, it is easy to give up all physical activity. But we are also talking about mental activities. Most professional people used their minds in their work more than their bodies and when they grow older it is precisely that mental activity that they don't want to repeat again.

Thus we have met former stock brokers who wouldn't return to that profession for a million dollar salary and former physi-



cians who don't even try to keep up on the latest medical news and retired government ministers who could care less about the current goings on in politics. They think of it as just more of the same struggles and exhausting, boring work that they once endured.

As the body fades away (and as the mind fades) and as we reflect that we have only a few "precious moments" left to live in our life, most people just don't want to engage in the same old animal acts all over again. (Though many are prone to outbursts of animal anger). They are for the most part happy to sit quietly by and let others run in the rat race as they once did.

Yet we have met a few older swamis and monks who still like to meditate. Meditation is not physically demanding and tiring nor is it mentally (intellectually) demanding.

Of course, when you first take up meditation it can pose some physical and mental problems since people are not used to sitting cross-legged for hours at a time. Nor are they used to concentrating their mind on some one task for long periods - most people today have short attention spans.

But beyond those few inconveniences, the lack of physical and mental activity in meditation does make us question whether "meditation" is not, after all, still the best sort of activity for the remaining "precious moments" of our life.

At the start, though, we have to be clear and emphasize about the fact that meditation is not a spiritual exercise (whatever that could mean).

Scientists who have run experiments on meditators always end up measuring physical things like breathing rate, heart rate, brain electrical waves or blood flow to different parts of the brain, as shown in fMRI machines.

Moreover, if you look in books on meditation you will usually see instructions that are confined to physical activities: how you are to sit, how you should breath, how you should concentrate on physical objects like candle flames, statues, pictures of swamis and so on.

These above two observations (about physical brain measurements during meditation, and physical preparation needed) tell us that meditation is just as much only a physical activity as are walking or eating. There doesn't seem to be any non-physical things to measure and no non-physical "steps" to take during meditation. In other words: meditation is actually just another physical exercise - like the famous yoga stretching postures.

Of course we should expect that meditation is only a physical exercise (capable of affecting body moods, feelings and emotions) since the whole idea of "spiritual" events is badly defined.

Even the supposed "goals" of meditation, such as nirvana, merging into god, and so on, are quite vague and hard to pin down. Nobody can explain exactly what they are, or what they consist of.

Ordinarily we can define what we mean by something like a cow by listing a set of properties that we can use to decide if we have a "cow" in front of us or not - to measure the "cowness" of the object. But ideas like nirvana are so vague and empty of meaning that nobody can determine any criteria to use to decide if you have or have not in fact reached nirvana. So of course no one can propose how you might measure "success" in meditation or even measure the amount or extent of progress on the way to the spiritual goal.

You can no more decide if you have reached "nirvana" in your meditation than you can decide if you have discovered non-black blackness or juicy rocks or talkative rocking chairs. You can't decide on whether you have juicy rocks or non-black-black or nir-

vana or god since these concepts are nonsense. Such concepts are just empty word play, probably used by religious thinkers to befuddle those human animals below them in the animal hierarchy.

And, of course, when you confront the "master meditators" with the fact that they are just using empty word play, they only respond with statements like, "of course, these are concepts that are beyond conceptualization." Or they might even deny that their concepts are concepts. while others go as far as denying that their words are words. That is, when you try to challenge their concepts as empty word play they respond with more empty word play.

But the "medium is the message." Their nonsense reply, when seen as animal behavior, really means that: "you think that you, a lower being than me in the social hierarchy, can challenge my superior statements (butt your head and horns against mine) and thereby challenge my position and status. Don't try."

If you can't know that you are in nirvana (can't decide whether or not the theory of nirvana is locally true), since it is beyond all your vain, inferior efforts to "turn it into concepts or words," then you can't decide if you have reached nirvana and can't thus decide if you are or are not the social equal of the "meditation masters."

While an African mole rat queen might befuddle the masses, and keep them under her control, with her hypnotic chemical excretions, the master meditators seem to befuddle their throngs of followers and groupies by exploiting language - inventing nonsense words like nirvana, and giving nonsense sentences about why their "words" like nirvana are "beyond words" and why their "concepts" like nirvana are "beyond concepts."

They actually believe that a hypnotic, spell binding jumble of words will confuse people enough to silence any criticism. Like most religious people, they imagine that issues are solved by de-

bates rather than by evidence. If they can challenge you to a debate and silence you (who can have responses ready on the spur of the moment for every counter attack?) then they have proven their point. Of course they just want to stop you from debating and meditate - but how can you meditate if you don't really know how to determine or decide if you are in fact progressing in your meditating or just dreaming or sleeping?

Of course, with a general decline in belief in religion among the masses, we might expect to find humans resorting to devices similar to those of the mole rats. That is, we might expect to find a compensating increase in chemical methods in human societies. And that is in fact the case. We find a general increase in the use of "recreational" drugs with hallucinogenic and psychogenic properties in our modern societies. Plus, just as the queen of the mole rats poisons her followers with chemicals, so the "enlightened" leaders in modern nations are increasingly in favor of "legalized" drug use.

But human leaders haven't as yet figured out how to be as efficient as the mole rats in their use of hypnotic drugs. Human-made drugs usually do more than just calm down the masses or make them docile and easy to push into work for their masters. Human drugs don't just addict the users. Our modern drugs often render the people into unusable vegetables or mental cripples who can no longer work for their slave drivers. And, the majority of drug addicts, who are not yet vegetables, often refuse to work for their masters, show up late to work, take off early or bungle the job.

So those at the top of the human animal hierarchies have a long way to go before they can expect to be as good as the mole rat queen at controlling the people with drugs. They may yet have to go back to religion.

Likewise, ordinary humans can still harvest the benefits of religious activities like meditation, but without the hypnotic downside of being controlled by the priests. If you know what you're

doing, and understand that meditation (like begging or prayer) is just social control and calming or stress-reducing social activity, then you can still take advantage of that calming ability and use meditation to your benefit.

It is just that you must always be careful. When you use meditation you must be on the alert for not turning yourself into a slave (or worshiper) of some swami or priest. You have to ensure that you meditate (or pray) for the physical and emotional calming and peace-bringing benefits it can bring you and not let others control your meditation for you. You should not ever abandon personal responsibility, throw down your guard, or act calmly and peacefully toward anyone who wants to lecture you or indoctrinate you with their ideas and wishes, during or after meditation.

Meditation doesn't just make us calm and peaceful. It also makes the brain pliable and suggestive. Thus, you should always be watchful not to let others feed you suggestions during meditation. Otherwise your meditation can serve to turn you into a puppet for some "master" or an uncritical, unquestioning groupie of some "sage" or "guru."

Indeed most meditators will often hear (from their "guru" or master) that they should not try to meditate on their own, alone, without some swami, guru or monk around to "guide" them. Translation: they want to make sure they are there to control you.

And people easily fall for this. After all, we seem to need coaches when we do sports. You can't get an Olympic gold medal on your own (these days, but you could in the past). Today every person who wants to "make it" in sports has to have, in fact, a huge team of coaches, trainers and advisers.

But the big difference is that the coaches have "well-defined" methods, practice sessions, schedules, training exercises, strength building exercises, exercise machinery, training facilities, technological aides and a well-defined goal: the gold medal. They also

can compare you (with video tapes) to others and show you (hard evidence) what you are doing wrong and right. Plus you always train with many people (the team) and are thereby not so open to being attacked by any one person.

But the meditation masters have none of that. They have a spiritual goal (whatever that means) but yet can only point out physical faults (not sitting up straight, not crossing the legs enough, not breathing in the right rhythm). Plus nobody really understands the spiritual goal. It is not a well defined goal, the way doing a triple lutz is to a skater. You don't, and can't, know what nirvana might be.

Moreover, all that meditation (training) doesn't seem to really be necessary. In many religions the vague "spiritual" goals are not earned or trained into. Usually they are just bestowed on you by grace, faith and so on (vague words themselves) and not by anything you do, or that your coach (guru) can help you with. Your "technique" is only useful if it "pleases" the king-god-universal mind.

Yet the meditation masters will always scold you for questioning the value of meditation as a "spiritual" exercise. And they know there is no way for you to go against what they tell you to do. If you can't know the ultimate goal of meditation (because there is nothing to know except empty words generated by word play) then you can't prove them wrong. And if you can't prove them wrong then you can't challenge their right to be at the top of the swami pyramid and telling you what to do.

So, just be aware that meditation when done as a religious activity has its dangers since you may be misled into thinking that it is something spiritual when it is just another animal behavior that helps keep the animal hierarchy functioning as it should for the survival of the fittest.

For that reason, even though the calming effects of meditation are obvious to anyone who tries it, it is perhaps better to not get involved with meditation as a stress-releasing method. After all, modern psychology has (as discussed previously) found other ways to help us get rid of stress.

In fact exercise, especially walking, is probably better than meditation as a way to work off stress and anxiety. Ray, personally, does not think he should waste the remaining "precious moments" of his life with a practice like meditation that is grounded in nonsense double-talk and apparently part of the human system of enforcing the animal survival hierarchy. He prefers to walk and write (good way to concentrate the mind), though he does occasionally meditate and is not anti-meditation as long as it is done with the above safety concerns in mind.

But before passing away from meditation and on to other topics, we should perhaps mention that a few meditating mystics have taken the befuddling and confounding value of empty word play to even greater lengths. A few Buddhists of the Yogacara school (saying they want people to stop thinking about theories and just meditate) also maintain that meditation is the only proper activity for us since physical objects don't really exist - all that exists is our consciousness.

Of course, if they thought about it, they would realize that this idea of "all is consciousness" introduces more problems than it solves. But showing any faults in their theory would be quite irrelevant to them. They recognize and know that they are just trying to confuse and confound their students and do not pretend that they are advancing any adequate or valid theory of their own.

According to them, this effort to confuse others is not done to maintain their status as top monk on the pile, but, rather, for the benefit of their students. This questionable benefit is that the students will no longer believe in the physical world of suffering. But it is hard to see how that is any sort of benefit since any other

sort of world is sheer imagination. The only real result of this ostrich-like denial of the world is that, if the students willingly won't go after the resources of the world then those resources would obviously be more available for others, especially for those at the top of the local animal hierarchy. In that case it would be exactly like what we see in the animal world where those at the bottom of the hierarchy willingly back away to let the dominant animals have first pick of the food.

Putting it another way, these Yogacara monks maintain that the physical world (the only thing we can sense, the only thing we can know, the only thing we can measure, the only thing we can make comparisons with, the only thing for which we can generate a list of properties, the only thing we can make decisions about) is just like an illusion, like events in a dream. But the mental (spiritual) world of imagined events (the one that cannot be investigated or verified or measured, the one for which we have no way to decide if it is true or not, the one that we can't know about), is the only real one.

This is, of course, just another great way for them to put off or intimidate any rebels or challengers to the status quo so that they won't even bother to challenge the leaders. Anyone who tries to challenge the "authority" of the master Yogacara monks is told that they are dreaming or under illusion. But those who believe what the masters tell them will go off to hide in the hills and engage in fruitless meditation practice (which can never bring the promised results) but which keeps them busy and thus away from challenging the top dogs,

Yet, the whole Yogacara theory is easily debunked if you just think about it.

First off, it is an extremely questionable practice to propose that some parts of our experience are real while others are illusory. To understand that, let's look at another statement. Consider whether it makes any sense to give a statement like, "the bird



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ate the apple,” and then, afterwards, claim the bird is real but the apple is an illusion or dream.

We should immediately want to ask, “Why?” Why should the bird be real but the apple an illusion? Why is the bird so special that it should be “real?” How is the bird more significant or important than the apple that it should have such a lop-sided position in our theory?

Now, applying this sort of questioning, let's look again at the Yogacara idea, and change "bird" to "mind" and "ate" to "thought about." We would then have the sentence, "my mind thought about an apple" with the qualification that the mind is real but the apple is a dream or an illusion. That is, if “consciousness senses an apple” then, in the Yogacara theory, the consciousness is real but the apple is an illusion.

Again, as with our questioning about the bird and the apple we should ask, "why?" Why should one be real and not the other? Why should consciousness be real but an apple not real?

Is it because you have made one the subject of the sentence and the other the predicate? That is, are we dealing with more empty word play?

There seems to be no Yogacara answer to this. We have to accept it because they say so - without any support from evidence, experience, or even from reasoning.

But the theory really gets us into difficulties if, instead of considering that we are aware of an apple, we consider that we are also aware of our own self. Our sentence, "I am aware of an apple," now becomes, "I am aware of my consciousness." Now "consciousness" plays the role of the "apple" in the previous example. If the apple, a predicate, is unreal then so is consciousness, the new predicate of this sentence. The real "I" is aware of unreal apples and equally unreal consciousness.

But the unreal "consciousness," the predicate in the sentence, is also the subject of the sentence. When we say "I" we mean my consciousness. So we have a lot of nonsense as a sentence: "My unreal consciousness is aware of unreal consciousness." Something unreal is (somehow) aware of something unreal.

But how can something that doesn't exist be aware?

Of course, Yogacara masters might applaud at this stage and proclaim, "Exactly so. That is what we want **you** to realize, that humans just can't understand ultimate reality. So stop thinking about it and just listen to us and meditate. Go away. Go off to the forest and meditate and leave us top dogs alone."

And that is where we can see that it is not the content of their statements (about nonsense concepts like ultimate realities) that is important but the tone and effect of the statements. In a sense they are no more than barking: top dogs in the pecking order trying to put down those below them. We can guess that, since there does not seem to be any other legitimate purpose to their willfully abusing the use of language as they do. They just won't acknowledge that there can be no such things as the "ultimate" truths that they want the students to waste time hungering after.

Moreover, ending up with a jumble of contradictory or nonsense sentences does not imply that every day things are unreal. It only implies that they started out on the wrong foot. It implies that something is wrong with the statements of the mystics.

Plus, even if the objects of the world were unreal, that doesn't mean that meditation would somehow allow us to peek beyond that unreality. We should, in fact, question whether there can even be any "real" meditation in a world of unreality. So the Yogacara Buddhist theory doesn't convince us of anything profound to be found through meditation. It just shows us more examples of people controlling others (through abuse of language) by sending them off on wild-goose chases.

Yet, the fact is that we are aware of objects like apples and our consciousness. So should we believe in what our experiences reveal to us, or rather, refuse to believe in our own experiences simply because some people (monks and swamis) tell us not to? There seems to be no good reason for why their experiences should be any more reliable than our own.

We always have to be on guard for people who want us to accept their theories on the basis of blind faith. For example, in one recent book by an Australian groupie of the Buddhist masters, the reader is told that many monks who have meditated for years are aware of their past lives. This is supposedly an indication of their progress in meditation. But yet we are also told that those same monks are too humble to speak about those past lives with others.

Now at first glance that may sound logical to you, but think about it. The monks **are not** too humble to tell others (brag about?) their knowledge of past lives, but yet **are** too humble to provide proof (details) about those past lives. Double talk. They want to eat their cake and have it to look at forever. They say they know of their past lives but won't prove it.

It is just another way to say "I am above you on the animal hierarchy." They are saying they are higher on the hierarchy since they have experienced past lives, while you obviously haven't. They know you haven't or you would be telling others about it (as one of them) and not listening, awe-struck and open-mouthed at their feet.

And furthermore, they will not help you to rise up to their level (what animal would) by providing details that might serve to confirm your faith in reincarnation, since that might help or guide you toward becoming one of them. It is like the Christian story of the garden of Eden: you are given the tree of knowledge but are unable to eat of it, "lest you become one of us."

In other words they can't give proof since the idea of past lives is not fact but just a weapon in the struggle for position on the animal hierarchy. (Which is why we personally don't give any credence to the ideas of reincarnation and past lives- we don't want to fall back into animal ways).

Getting away from the (unconscious?) animalistic purpose behind the Yogacara theories (as weapons to enforce animal hierarchies) and back on to the Yogacara idea of the unreality of the objects we experience, we will conclude with one more problem with this theory.

If there are no real "apples" (they only exist in your imagination, in your mind) then how could you have come up with the idea of an apple, in all its complex and involved details?

Was the idea of an "apple" just a random accident of your imagination, of your consciousness, in its random walk of imagining? Raw chance?

Or is there some other mechanism of mind at work here? Some force that lets you "imagine" an apple, and develop all the rich details of its structure in space, its anatomy, and its functions and development and evolution or progress through time, and all the complicated interactions of apples with other things?

If there is such an "imagination" force, and not raw chance, then that would have to be one hugely complicated force of imagination.

Those seem to be the only 2 possible explanations for how we can "imagine" something like an apple. Either we have a force of wild random imaginings that by chance creates complex things or we have a nonrandom, complex, involved imagination force driving these things into creation. Either way we get into trouble.

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By allowing for imagination we are in fact saying that there is a lot more in existence than just consciousness or awareness (or to your consciousness) that is "real" with the rest all imaginary.

There is, as a minimum, your consciousness plus also this mechanism for consciousness to go about imagining complicated things. So the Yogacara theory of consciousness-only just can't be true, it is missing any explanation for how this consciousness-only can be conscious of the unreal things.

But, even if we allow for 2 real things, both consciousness and imagination, this new, better theory of consciousness-and-imagination-only takes us to another level of absurdity.

We can immediately ask why we should not have "real" apples built by "real" forces of the universe, but yet have just as complex, just as detailed, just as involved, "imaginary" apples built by an "imagination force" of consciousness?

Why is it that detailed, complex imaginary apples can exist but detailed, complex real apples can't? One theory is no more "simple" than another. Both theories require a sophisticated force outside of our "consciousness" to make the objects (real or imaginary) manifest themselves.

To decide between the two theories (real objects or imaginary objects) we would have to see proof of one or the other theory. But in fact there is no way to prove one theory or the other.

We can imaginatively eat an imaginary apple and enjoy the imaginary taste just as we can really eat a real apple and enjoy the real taste.

So we might as well go on with the popular theory that everyone today accepts: of objects as real (locally true).

In a sense, though, the case is almost settled by default since Yogacara monks are silent about ways to prove their theory of the unreality of objects (except by meditation, but then they are

also silent on how meditation could prove this unreality true). They just want us to believe their theory on their say-so.

But, on the other side, with the theory of real objects, scientists have found complex mechanisms to explain the origins of their complex real objects.

And, of course, as we stated earlier, a few monks basically tell us that they are only joking around anyway: they are just proposing their theory of a complicated imaginary world with complicated imaginary apples in order to destroy (or make us doubt) our theory of a real world with real apples.

That, of course, just means that they don't really believe in their theory of the unreality of objects - which they don't. They simply want to destroy our desire to ask questions about the world and force us to do all that they think should remain: meditate.

But the inability to distinguish whether the world is real or imaginary has no bearing on whether we should or should not engage in meditation.

Certainly if you can't distinguish between a theory about real apples and a theory about imaginary apples you might want to then just give up - and accept the Buddhist idea that "ultimately" there is nothing. That might leave you with only nirvana or extinction.

But you can't even confirm that there is such an absolute extinction or nirvana. So nirvana certainly can't be accepted as a legitimate reason (except by a die-hard and uncritical groupie) for meditation. Nirvana is just one more of those badly defined nonsense concepts involving absolutes.

Nobody can prove (by meditation or otherwise) anything about absolutes. So there can be no proof that performing a finite

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(local or relative) physical activity like meditation can bring you to such spiritual absolutes like nirvana.

Nor does the Yogacara effort (to confuse us about whether apples are real or imaginary or neither) help convince us of the value of meditation.

Giving up thinking about theories (of consciousness and apples) as Yogacara encourages us to do, doesn't imply that meditation is the only **other** thing left to do. In fact giving up thinking about whether apples are real or imaginary doesn't even imply that we should give up all thinking.

At the very least there is also the possibility of a return to the **unthinking** and **unmeditating** state of plants and worms and single cell life. For example, some practitioners of the Hindu yoga meditation take the lotus plant as the symbol for meditation. They hope to one day become as thoughtless (empty-headed), peaceful, quiet and contented or happy as the lotus flower.

And some practitioners of meditation, in the style of the southern Buddhists (Hinayana), use a type of meditation that is a return to a infant-like use of the mind. They call this meditation, inappropriately, by the name of "mindfulness."

The basic idea of "mindfulness" is that, instead of becoming thoughtless like a plant, they hope to become thoughtless like an infant.

For example, when we were young and first learning to walk we needed to concentrate on every step we took. But then, as we mastered walking it became an unconscious habit. The "how to walk" steps got shoved down to the lower areas of the mind and turned into a habit, which henceforth coordinated all the walking for us.

Because of the creation of the walking habit, our thinking mind was freed to use in more advanced tasks – like **sensing** the

world around us, **deciding** if there is danger or food near us, **re-calling** previous similar situations from the past, **deciding** about what to do and **thinking** about the best way to act (and also **thinking** about the meaning of the universe).

In mindfulness meditation the student is almost told to abandon any higher mental activities (thinking, decision making) and once again (as when they were an infant) concentrate on the details of the various physical actions like walking, sitting, and breathing. Thus the mindfulness meditators walk with the mind focusing on each and every step they take or on each and every breath they inhale, instead of on whether there is a tiger or coconut tree near by.

In something like "mindful" walking they move slowly across the floor (almost painfully slow) while paying attention to each and every step they take as if they were a toddler who had to concentrate hard on his steps in case he might fall over.

A thousand years ago, someone probably thought that this "return to infancy" was a good way to stop the mind from thinking. It certainly takes you away from worry, fear and anxiety - if that is your goal - since children are so busy just learning how to live (how to read, write, walk and talk) that they don't have time to let their mind waste away with worry.

But do we have to return to being a child to calm ourselves or eliminate destructive thoughts?

Moreover, it goes without saying that such meditation can have no pretense of being directed toward achieving the nonsense or ultimate "spiritual" goals of mystics, since it is a total concentration on non-spiritual, that is physical, tasks. In that sense it is similar to Hatha Yoga, the twisting, stretching exercises and breathing that is the only form of yoga known to most people in the western-world.



Indeed a few yogis might even maintain that the one, and only, purpose of the physical body and physical mind, and by implication then has little to do with spiritual disciplines. Thus some yogis try to get the mind to concentrate on more than just "mindfulness" walking and sitting. They try to concentrate on and control the breathing rate or the body heat. Still others try to control their hunger or pain response - they run needles through their lips or sit on hot coal fires or beds of needles. A few even try to control the heart beat consciously, and not let the subconscious mind (habits and instincts) handle it.

In a sense they are misusing the mind. Imagine being faced with a lion attacking you and having to consciously concentrate on getting your heart to beat faster instead of thinking about where the rifle is located.

In short, not only do these yogis want to "take back" the activities of the infant, as in mindful walking where they hope to return to the mental activities of the first few years of our life, but they also want to regain control of the animal instincts. They want to consciously regain control of activities, like heat regulation or pain response, control that the body, after millions of years of evolution, had found useful to submerge beyond our conscious control - so that our conscious mind could be free for thinking and decision making.

If your goal is to run away and join the circus then such feats as showing how you have regained control of pain, or of every walking step, might be useful. But it seems like a high price to pay just to get the conscious mind away from worries, just to get individuals away from abusing their conscious mind by misusing it or "poisoning it" with worry, fear and regrets.

Even hypnotism seems very non-invasive by comparison.

Don't misunderstand us. We are not saying that mindfulness is not useful. It is a good way to relax, unwind and reduce stress. But we just think there are maybe better ways to calm yourself.

Thomas Edison once said, "in the silence it just dawns on you." So sometimes we need meditation-like activities to get our mind to relax. Yet other inventors have found it just as useful to go into sound-proof boxes or sit at the bottom of swimming pools, or even go off for a walk by themselves in the forest. Or they might, as Robert Frost said, try, "stopping by woods on a snowy evening." Yet others again find great mental benefit and joy in listening to music in the security of their home, reading a poem or participating in a sport

And a few have found that the best way to calm the over-worked mind is to go to sleep for a few hours. The discoverer of the chemical structure of benzene, Friedrich Kekule, got his insight by going for a good night's rest and then having a dream about benzene. (And some types of meditation are almost like sleep).

And (to show that religion is not completely useless) Michael Faraday got his idea for how the magnetic and electric fields are related, and, thereby, invented the electric motor and the electric generator, while thinking deeply about cosmic circles as advocated by his religion.

So we always have to remember that there are many methods besides meditation that can be used to release our stress and get us away from the poisoning whirlpool of our worrying mind.

Furthermore, the advertised goal of Buddhism (of all varieties) is to end suffering. Some see this ending of suffering as justification for meditation: you won't suffer if you stop thinking. And some go even further: you won't suffer if you don't exist or are "nirvanaized" - Nirvana means blown out - and thus they pro-

posed meditation as a way to end suffering by taking us beyond our worldly existence.

But that gets us into another area where the Buddhists haven't thought through all the implications of meditation. What is the definition of that concept that is so important and fundamental to Buddhists- suffering? What is suffering? Is suffering only pain of humans or does it include pain experienced by any life form? And, if so, then how do you measure whether you have reduced the suffering of all plants? Yet that is a Buddhist goal- ending of suffering for *all* beings. (Of course they skip off to consider helping and preaching to the gods, spirits and heavenly beings and forget about plants and worms and mosquitoes).

And that also drives us into even further absurdities. If meditation (and not thinking) is the "best" way to achieve the Buddhist goal of ending suffering, then we have to ask: can worms meditate? Can plants meditate? Can you teach a spider or a lotus flower to meditate? If not, then how can you maintain that meditation is the best activity for ending suffering? That would condemn most lifeforms, the vast majority who can't meditate, to lifelong pain on the earth, to long lasting suffering.

Furthermore, giving up thinking, and just meditating in your "precious moments," even if it reduced us beyond the level of the thinking mammals and down to the level of a worm, or bacteria, or Fig tree (or Banyan tree) or a lotus, doesn't guarantee us a life free of suffering. How could it? How could it help us until that meditation takes us to the final, unreachable goal of an ultimate nirvana? So in the meantime (that is forever), being short of the final and impossible goal, we must always be subject to suffering.

At the most meditation might make us unaware of our suffering, or maybe, unaware that what we feel is destroying us (giving us pain).

In fact, if we stop and think about suffering we realize that pain arises when parts of us are destroyed. A bacteria chews on our guts and we feel the pain. We suffer what we call an illness. Or, some parts of our knee joint deteriorate with wear-and-tear use as we age and we feel the pain. We suffer what we call aging.

So, if destruction of what we call the "us" leads to suffering then isn't meditation also suffering? Meditation tries to get us to stop thinking (using one of our natural functions) just as a spike of calcium in a knee joint gets us to stop moving our leg. It denies us full use of our humanness. Plus if we think of meditation in regard to its so-called ultimate purpose, of taking us to final destruction (non-existence of what we are) or nirvana, then we might even call meditation the ultimate suffering.

Of course that is only if we don't want to end our earthly existence. If you want that then you won't think of it as suffering. But who wants to purposefully end their existence, except someone who thinks, on blind faith in the advice of "masters," that that is a good thing. Who imagines that there aren't other ways to end suffering - such as inventing vaccines, refrigerators and automobiles. Who believes falsely that, while most suffering can only be locally ended (for a short time and in a particular place), that it is possible to "ultimately" end all suffering.

There is no reason to suppose that there is such a thing as the "ultimate" end of suffering, just as there is no reason to believe that any ultimate is other than a nonsense concept and abuse of language. If that is the case then the whole Buddhist goal of ending all suffering may be an impossibility.

So we have to just ignore the Yogacara efforts to pretend that there is some high and important ultimate "spiritual" purpose to meditation and that meditation should be preferred over "thinking." That only leads us to absurdities.

Getting back then to the original point, when we started this chapter, we should not consider meditation as some sort of ultimate spiritual practice that leads us to ultimate goals or ultimate realization of the true nature (real or imaginary) of the universe. Nor is there any reason why we should we consider meditation (and not thinking) as the highest activity for humans.

Meditation is just another one of the multitude of useful exercise (like stretching the legs in the morning) that helps us make the present moment more livable (sometimes and in some circumstances, locally).

In fact, thinking seems to be the paramount human activity, not meditation.

Humans became the dominant creature on this planet by using their mental abilities - to make tools like spears and knives and wheels, to harness natural forces like fire and wind and water, to invent refrigerators and light bulbs and computers. Humans further extended their range over the whole earth and on to the moon and all with their thinking mind. If we had sat there meditating, instead of thinking about making fires and wheels and spear points and taming elephants and dogs and cattle, we might still be back in Africa where we originated and chewing bamboo shoots.

And the poorest countries today, where the people **suffer** the most from hunger and disease, are the ones where religions (of prayer and meditation) are strongest. Only India has brought itself up from poverty by promoting the thinkers (scientific and business) in its country and done that in spite of its ancient tradition of meditation.

Europe became great, not because its Christian fanatics overran the world like locusts, destroying the monuments, culture and writings of the peoples they met, but because many in Europe were fired up with the ideas of exploration, discovery, research, science and invention.

This type of mental activity excites the mind. Gets it interested. It makes explorer and scientist happy. Almost ecstatic. Ray once met a fellow at university, Paul, who told him that working a mathematical equation got him more aroused than having sex with his wife.

And it is not just scientists and explorers who get excited and happy when they use their minds. Business tycoons know they have little time to worry when they are excited about some new venture. Artists and musicians know they have little time to worry when they are excited about creating a painting, playing the piano or composing music. A few musicians and artists have gone mad, but not when they felt someone appreciated their work. Vincent Van Gogh, for example, suffered not because he painted masterpieces but because nobody bought a single painting of his while he was alive. His only relief from the agony of existence was in painting. And some modern rock musicians suffer, not because of their music, but because of drug habits or feelings that they are unable, anymore, to produce the great music they love.

Scientists, explorers, inventors, business tycoons, artists, musicians and composers - they are the ones who, measurably, reduce the greatest amount of suffering in our world today and bring the greatest happiness to themselves and others.

This use of our conscious mind for going forward with science and research, not for going backwards to take charge of subconscious activity like walking and breathing with mindfulness meditation, is what made man great. And keeps away worries and suffering from humanity at large.

Which is the best way to end suffering in the world? Is it to run away and hide in a cave in the Himalayas and meditate all day and tell yourself that you are "radiating" compassion to the world? Or to discover a vaccine that saves ten thousand people from screaming in agony as a virus slowly eats away their body?

Well we really have no way to answer that question, since we have no way to measure the effect of meditation on the world around us. But we can measure the effect of the vaccine. And we can see that scientists who invent vaccines are happy with the results of their work.

Chinmayananda once met a group of youngsters who said to him, "swami, what you get from your meditation we can have more quickly with drugs." He didn't reply to that. Nor did he say anything to the audience. But that night, instead of a session on meditation, we all went to an evening of cultural music and dance.

Even the most hardened drug user will seldom exchange concert tickets, to see his favorite rock band, for a measly pack of drugs. They know that music makes them happy. And as Chinmayananda once said that, though the world brings suffering, "everyone wants happiness."

But few want, knowingly at least, to render themselves mindless. How can you be happy if you don't have a mind to enjoy that happiness?

Even the most physically invalid person at a nursing home, with a mind ruined by Alzheimer's disease or destroyed by strokes that cause dementia, still can feel happiness.

In the last precious moments, the last "nows" of our life, it seems more fitting to spend our time in trying to be happy, and in making other's happy. It seems more fitting to run down the road to happiness than to run away from suffering. It seems more fitting to enjoy our mind than to lose it or abandon it in meditation.

And the best way to do that doesn't seem to be running away to hide and meditate and pretend you have compassion for others.

Nor is it good to spend too much time trying to "help" others or show compassion for them. One of Chinmayananda's friends,

swami Krishnananda, once said (in a video) that it was difficult to help others. They will often resent your help, saying to themselves, "who do you think you are?" Or, worse yet, "who do you think I am. Someone who is desperate or needs your help?"

That is, helping someone gives out the message that you are better than them, or above them on the social hierarchy, and able to offer them resources. But they are below you in the hierarchy and thus lacking the resources they need (that belong to you, their superior).

Helping is a way to enforce the hierarchy. In the animal world the superior animals will sometimes be generous and offer gifts of food to those below them in the hierarchy. But they will resent it if a lower animal turns the tables and offers them food. This tells us that "helping" others is just a way to enforce the survival-based hierarchy.

Plus we all know that humans give to their children but don't expect the children to give anything to them. It would be embarrassing to them to take charity from one of their children, one who is below you in the social order.

When we did volunteer work for charities in Toronto we frequently found that the caregivers felt good about the charity work they performed. Of course they would, since giving meant you were "above" the street people you "served."

But those who came for help often resented you. Or they imagined they were "using" you, going off to 2 or 3 free Christmas dinners, for example, and "taking advantage" of the stupid volunteers. It seems that the only "happiness" was for the volunteers who "helped" others - if you can call it help when you make people resent you.

So the happiness that comes with compassionate giving is not the type of happiness we want. It does not seem to reduce suffering in the world. It seems to only make you happy that you are



not "like them, the unfortunates." In other words charity only makes you happy because you feel above others in the hierarchy. When most people see some unfortunate individual they often say, "thank god it is not me." But that just means, "I'm lucky not to be **down** there like him."

Real happiness is self-centered and not concerned with making others free of suffering. It is about making yourself happy first, by doing the things you like. You do things that use your mind: science, exploration, business, research, art or music. You get joy from using your mind.

The mind feels good when it gets used, just as muscles strengthen only when they get used. And when you feel good others sense it and feel good too. They don't resent your happiness the way they resent your help. Your happiness catches hold of them almost as a contagion - we seem programmed to react to social good feeling.

So just do your own thing. Use your mind for things that interest you, especially for learning, reading, writing and researching. Then let others feel the happiness you feel as a side effect. End their "suffering" that way, as a side effect of being happy yourself. Laugh and you will see them laugh too. For example we recently went to the park and experimented with a robot. We laughed as we made it walk around. Our enjoyment made others happy. Our interest in this mind-made curiosity attracted others. They became mentally interested in how it worked. That mental interest made them happy (for a while, locally).

Of course you can find joy in non-thinking activities while hating some thinking activities. For example you can find joy in dancing and singing (in a church or temple) but not in the thought-out "doctrines" of the religion. You just have to understand that those doctrines are there only as an excuse to do the singing and dancing. The doctrines themselves, and probably the words of the songs, are likely ignorance incarnate.

You can find joy in meditating (chanting "om" with a group) but not in the dogmas of meditation, the hope of reaching some ultimate god or nirvana. The doctrines are there only as an excuse to meditate. The thought-out content of the doctrines, and the words of the chant, are likely ignorance incarnate while the actions of chanting are joyful.

So sometimes we can find happiness in non-thinking activities (dance, song, music, art) and even meditation, as well as in the thinking activities of science, research and exploration. Variety is a good way to find happiness in the final precious moments of life.

We reached the end of our road to happiness, without ignorance, by discovering that the roads laid down by religions don't lead to such a place. They lead to bliss but with ignorance. They only confirm that ignorance is bliss. But if you want truth or knowledge with your bliss, and full use of your mind as a tool for creating joy, then you have to go to science, business and arts.

However, you may have noticed that we also want more than bliss without ignorance. We also want to rise above animal existence, especially above having to act as part of the animal hierarchy system.

Although the mind evolved to aid in survival of the body, the mind now seems free to explore the whole of the universe - things that have little to do with our chance of survival at this moment.

Scientists, as human animals, are still victimized by being in hierarchies - having to bow down to the scientific establishment and the accepted theories and top dog authorities of the scientific community. But that instinct to order humans into hierarchies seems confined to the lower, ancient, animal part of our brain.

Luckily, the human mind also has a part that does not seem subject to those ancient instincts, a part that is free to explore. This is why science and exploration, if it further develops that part of our brain, may be the best way of all (better than business, art and music) to find joy with knowledge and without ignorance.

In the last precious moments of our life, at the end of our road to happiness and knowledge, we spend our time and energy in any activity that uses our mind. That is, we spend most of our moments with learning.

But in that moment we always remind ourselves that life is not permanent. We are here for only a few short years. And, during that short period, we are constantly changing physically and mentally. And our social and economic situation is always changing. So it is a great waste of a lifetime to take anything too seriously.

How can anyone take seriously events that last only 80 years or less, in a universe that is 12 billion years old? It is better to just laugh, joyfully not mockingly, at the universe.

We are like a speck of dust compared to the size of the earth, which is like a speck of dust compared to the size of the solar system, which is like a speck of dust compared to the size of our milky way galaxy, which is like a speck of dust compared to the size of our local group of galaxies, which is not even visible compared to the size of the universe. This means that we are less than a nothing in the universe. How can anyone take activities of such a tiny piece of dust seriously? Laugh.

And since we are tiny dust specks it is silly to get angry when we view the atrocities of politicians, religions and multinational corporations. It is ridiculous to get upset about the tyrants, leaders and rebels in the animal hierarchies.

We should take it as a comedy. A human comedy or animal comedy. Enjoy the joke of these people imagining that being at the top of the heap (local earth heap) is a great accomplishment.

Take amusement in their silliness.

Nor should we get angry and upset when we see the leaders among the human animals hogging all the resources (food, water, oil, guns, money) for themselves while others starve or suffer. This is just the ancient animal way that evolved over millions of years and these leaders are just blindly behaving according to evolved instincts beyond their control, the way animals always behave.

That too is a great joke on them since they don't think they are animals. They think they are great (their blind instincts make them feel that way to enforce their blind obedience to the instinctual rules of hierarchies). It is slapstick comedy to see puppets dragged along the stage as part of a drama, while shouting as if they are in control of the whole production.

Nor should we get angry when we see the masses blindly following the rebels and leaders and shunning education and science. This is simply the way the masses of animals always act. Instincts, evolved for purposes of survival, force them to give up their lives to follow the leader and to give up needed resources to the leader. That blind instinct for the masses to follow leaders evolved since it is the best way to insure survival of the fittest.

So, although the ordinary citizen might think they are a great member of society, obedient, a model citizen, a loyal and patriotic upholder of justice, they are blindly being dragged along by their instincts to let the leaders control them. The difference between what they think they are and what they really are is also a comedy. Laughable.

Perhaps the greatest joy in life does not come just from pursuing mental activities, like science, business, art and exploration, but from watching and studying the human comedy around you.

Observation of the behavior of human animals will usually make you smile and sometimes make you laugh. If it doesn't then

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you are probably taking life too seriously, treating people as more important than they are - that is, you are letting your animal instincts, such as the animal tendency to worship those at the top of the animal hierarchy, take control of you. Don't let your instincts to worship leaders overpower you.

Never forget to laugh (merrily not aggressively) at the efforts of others to impress you with false knowledge. Always criticize whatever you read and hear and treat it as a joke until you think it over for yourself thoroughly.

The comedy of life is to be enjoyed, not dreaded. At the end of the road to happiness with truth, we must never forget to laugh about what others (and we) do.



## Appendix 1      Some Suggested Reading

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